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THE POEMS
OF
ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

IN SIX VOLUMES

VOLUME IV

TRISTRAM OF LYONESSE
THE TALE OF BALEN
ATALANTA IN CALYDON
ERECHTHEUS



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TRISTRAM OF LYONESSE

TO MY BEST FRIEND
THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON

*Spring speaks again, and all our woods are stirred,
And all our wide glad wastes aflower around,
That twice have heard keen April's clarion sound
Since here we first together saw and heard
Spring's light reverberate and reiterate word
Shine forth and speak in season. Life stands crowned
Here with the best one thing it ever found,
As of my soul's best birthdays dawns the third.*

*There is a friend that as the wise man saith
Cleaves closer than a brother: nor to me
Hath time not shown, through days like waves at strife
This truth more sure than all things else but death,
This pearl most perfect found in all the sea
That washes toward your feet these waifs of life.*

THE PINES: April 1882.

PRELUDE

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT

LOVE, that is first and last of all things made,
The light that has the living world for shade,
The spirit that for temporal veil has on
The souls of all men woven in unison,
One fiery raiment with all lives inwrought
And lights of sunny and starry deed and thought,
And alway through new act and passion new
Shines the divine same body and beauty through,
The body spiritual of fire and light
That is to worldly noon as noon to night;
Love, that is flesh upon the spirit of man
And spirit within the flesh whence breath began;
Love, that keeps all the choir of lives in chime;
Love, that is blood within the veins of time;
That wrought the whole world without stroke of
 hand,
Shaping the breadth of sea, the length of land,
And with the pulse and motion of his breath
Through the great heart of the earth strikes life and
 death,
The sweet twain chords that make the sweet tune
 live
Through day and night of things alternative,

TRISTRAM OF LYONESSE

Through silence and through sound of stress and
 strife,

And ebb and flow of dying death and life;
Love, that sounds loud or light in all men's ears,
Whence all men's eyes take fire from sparks of tears,
That binds on all men's feet or chains or wings;
Love, that is root and fruit of terrene things;
Love, that the whole world's waters shall not drown,
The whole world's fiery forces not burn down;
Love, that what time his own hands guard his head
The whole world's wrath and strength shall not
 strike dead;

Love, that if once his own hands make his grave
The whole world's pity and sorrow shall not save;
Love, that for very life shall not be sold,
Nor bought nor bound with iron nor with gold;
So strong that heaven, could love bid heaven fare-
 well,

Would turn to fruitless and unflowering hell;
So sweet that hell, to hell could love be given,
Would turn to splendid and sonorous heaven;
Love that is fire within thee and light above,
And lives by grace of nothing but of love;
Through many and lovely thoughts and much desire
Led these twain to the life of tears and fire;
Through many and lovely days and much delight
Led these twain to the lifeless life of night.

Yea, but what then? albeit all this were thus,
And soul smote soul and left it ruinous,
And love led love as eyeless men lead men,
Through chance by chance to deathward—Ah, what
 then?

TRISTRAM OF LYONESSE

Hath love not likewise led them further yet,
Out through the years where memories rise and set,
Some large as suns, some moon-like warm and pale,
Some starry-sighted, some through clouds that sail
Seen as red flame through spectral float of fume,
Each with the blush of its own special bloom
On the fair face of its own coloured light,
Distinguishable in all the host of night,
Divisible from all the radiant rest
And separable in splendour? Hath the best
Light of love's all, of all that burn and move,
A better heaven than heaven is? Hath not love
Made for all these their sweet particular air
To shine in, their own beams and names to bear,
Their ways to wander and their wards to keep,
Till story and song and glory and all things sleep?
Hath he not plucked from death of lovers dead
Their musical soft memories, and kept red
The rose of their remembrance in men's eyes,
The sunsets of their stories in his skies,
The blush of their dead blood in lips that speak
Of their dead lives, and in the listener's cheek
That trembles with the kindling pity lit
In gracious hearts for some sweet fever-fit,
A fiery pity enkindled of pure thought
By tales that make their honey out of nought,
The faithless faith that lives without belief
Its light life through, the griefless ghost of grief?
Yea, as warm night refashions the sere blood
In storm-struck petal or in sun-struck bud,
With tender hours and tempering dew to cure
The hunger and thirst of day's distemperature

TRISTRAM OF LYONESSE

And ravin of the dry discolouring hours,
Hath he not bid relume their flameless flowers
With summer fire and heat of lamping song,
And bid the short-lived things, long dead, live long,
And thought remake their wan funereal fames,
And the sweet shining signs of women's names
That mark the months out and the weeks anew
He moves in changeless change of seasons through
To fill the days up of his dateless year
Flame from Queen Helen to Queen Guenevere?
For first of all the sphery signs whereby
Love severs light from darkness, and most high,
In the white front of January there glows
The rose-red sign of Helen like a rose:
And gold-eyed as the shore-flower shelterless
Whereon the sharp-breathed sea blows bitterness,
A storm-star that the seafarers of love
Strain their wind-wearied eyes for glimpses of,
Shoots keen through February's grey frost and damp
The lamplike star of Hero for a lamp;
The star that Marlowe sang into our skies
With mouth of gold, and morning in his eyes;
And in clear March across the rough blue sea
The signal sapphire of Alcyone
Makes bright the blown brows of the wind-foot year;
And shining like a sunbeam-smitten tear
Full ere it fall, the fair next sign in sight
Burns opal-wise with April-coloured light
When air is quick with song and rain and flame,
My birth-month star that in love's heaven hath name
Iseult, a light of blossom and beam and shower,
My singing sign that makes the song-tree flower;

TRISTRAM OF LYONESSE

Next like a pale and burning pearl beyond
The rose-white sphere of flower-named Rosamond
Signs the sweet head of Maytime; and for June
Flares like an angered and storm-reddening moon
Her signal sphere, whose Carthaginian pyre
Shadowed her traitor's flying sail with fire;
Next, glittering as the wine-bright jacinth-stone,
A star south-risen that first to music shone,
The keen girl-star of golden Juliet bears
Light northward to the month whose forehead wears
Her name for flower upon it, and his trees
Mix their deep English song with Veronese;
And like an awful sovereign chrysolite
Burning, the supreme fire that blinds the night,
The hot gold head of Venus kissed by Mars,
A sun-flower among small sphered flowers of stars,
The light of Cleopatra fills and burns
The hollow of heaven whence ardent August yearns;
And fixed and shining as the sister-shed
Sweet tears for Phaethon disorbed and dead,
The pale bright autumn's amber-coloured sphere,
That through September sees the saddening year
As love sees change through sorrow, hath to name
Francesca's; and the star that watches flame
The embers of the harvest overgone
Is Thisbe's, slain of love in Babylon,
Set in the golden girdle of sweet signs
A blood-bright ruby; last save one light shines
An eastern wonder of spherical chrysopras,
The star that made men mad, Angelica's;
And latest named and lordliest, with a sound
Of swords and harps in heaven that ring it round,

TRISTRAM OF LYONESSE

Last love-light and last love-song of the year's,
Gleams like a glorious emerald Guenevere's.
These are the signs wherethrough the year sees
move,

Full of the sun, the sun-god which is love,
A fiery body blood-red from the heart
Outward, with fire-white wings made wide apart,
That close not and uncloze not, but upright
Steered without wind by their own light and might
Sweep through the flameless fire of air that rings
From heaven to heaven with thunder of wheels and
wings

And antiphones of motion-moulded rhyme
Through spaces out of space and timeless time.

So shine above dead chance and conquered change
The spherèd signs, and leave without their range
Doubt and desire, and hope with fear for wife,
Pale pains, and pleasures long worn out of life.
Yea, even the shadows of them spiritless,
Through the dim door of sleep that seem to press,
Forms without form, a piteous people and blind,
Men and no men, whose lamentable kind
The shadow of death and shadow of life compel
Through semblances of heaven and false-faced hell,
Through dreams of light and dreams of darkness
tost

On waves innavigable, are these so lost?
Shapes that wax pale and shift in swift strange wise,
Void faces with unspeculative eyes,
Dim things that gaze and glare, dead mouths that
move,

Featureless heads discrowned of hate and love,

TRISTRAM OF LYONESSE

Mockeries and masks of motion and mute breath,
Leavings of life, the superflux of death—
If these things and no more than these things be
Left when man ends or changes, who can see?
Or who can say with what more subtle sense
Their subtler natures taste in air less dense
A life less thick and palpable than ours,
Warmed with faint fires and sweetened with dead
flowers

And measured by low music? how time fares
In that wan time-forgotten world of theirs,
Their pale poor world too deep for sun or star
To live in, where the eyes of Helen are,
And hers who made as God's own eyes to shine
The eyes that met them of the Florentine,
Wherein the godhead thence transfigured lit
All time for all men with the shadow of it?
Ah, and these too felt on them as God's grace
The pity and glory of this man's breathing face;
For these too, these my lovers, these my twain,
Saw Dante, saw God visible by pain,
With lips that thundered and with feet that trod
Before men's eyes incognisable God;
Saw love and wrath and light and night and fire
Live with one life and at one mouth respire,
And in one golden sound their whole soul heard
Sounding, one sweet immitigable word.

They have the night, who had like us the day;
We, whom day binds, shall have the night as
they.

We, from the fetters of the light unbound,
Healed of our wound of living, shall sleep sound.

TRISTRAM OF LYONESSE

All gifts but one the jealous God may keep
From our soul's longing, one he cannot—sleep.
This, though he grudge all other grace to prayer,
This grace his closed hand cannot choose but spare.
This, though his ear be sealed to all that live,
Be it lightly given or lothly, God must give.
We, as the men whose name on earth is none,
We too shall surely pass out of the sun;
Out of the sound and eyeless light of things,
Wide as the stretch of life's time-wandering wings,
Wide as the naked world and shadowless,
And long-lived as the world's own weariness.
Us too, when all the fires of time are cold,
The heights shall hide us and the depths shall hold.
Us too, when all the tears of time are dry,
The night shall lighten from her tearless eye.
Blind is the day and eyeless all its light,
But the large unbewildered eye of night
Hath sense and speculation; and the sheer
Limitless length of lifeless life and clear,
The timeless space wherein the brief worlds move
Clothed with light life and fruitful with light love,
With hopes that threaten, and with fears that cease,
Past fear and hope, hath in it only peace.

Yet of these lives inlaid with hopes and fears,
Spun fine as fire and jewelled thick with tears,
These lives made out of loves that long since were,
Lives wrought as ours of earth and burning air,
Fugitive flame, and water of secret springs,
And clothed with joys and sorrows as with wings,
Some yet are good, if aught be good, to save
Some while from washing wreck and wrecking wave.

TRISTRAM OF LYONESSE

Was such not theirs, the twain I take, and give
Out of my life to make their dead life live
Some days of mine, and blow my living breath
Between dead lips forgotten even of death?
So many and many of old have given my twain
Love and live song and honey-hearted pain,
Whose root is sweetness and whose fruit is sweet,
So many and with such joy have tracked their feet,
What should I do to follow? yet I too,
I have the heart to follow, many or few
Be the feet gone before me; for the way,
Rose-red with remnant roses of the day
Westward, and eastward white with stars that break,
Between the green and foam is fair to take
For any sail the sea-wind steers for me
From morning into morning, sea to sea.

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

ABOUT the middle music of the spring
Came from the castled shore of Ireland's king
A fair ship stoutly sailing, eastward bound
And south by Wales and all its wonders round
To the loud rocks and ringing reaches home
That take the wild wrath of the Cornish foam,
Past Lyonesse unswallowed of the tides
And high Carlion that now the steep sea hides
To the wind-hollowed heights and gusty bays
Of sheer Tintagel, fair with famous days.
Above the stem a gilded swallow shone,
Wrought with straight wings and eyes of glittering
stone
As flying sunward oversea, to bear
Green summer with it through the singing air.
And on the deck between the rowers at dawn,
As the bright sail with brightening wind was drawn,
Sat with full face against the strengthening light
Iseult, more fair than foam or dawn was white.
Her gaze was glad past love's own singing of,
And her face lovely past desire of love.
Past thought and speech her maiden motions were,
And a more golden sunrise was her hair.

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

The very veil of her bright flesh was made
As of light woven and moonbeam-coloured shade
More fine than moonbeams; white her eyelids shone
As snow sun-stricken that endures the sun,
And through their curled and coloured clouds of deep
Luminous lashes thick as dreams in sleep
Shone as the sea's depth swallowing up the sky's
The springs of unimaginable eyes.
As the wave's subtler emerald is pierced through
With the utmost heaven's inextricable blue,
And both are woven and molten in one sleight
Of amorous colour and implicated light
Under the golden guard and gaze of noon,
So glowed their awless amorous plenilune,
Azure and gold and ardent grey, made strange
With fiery difference and deep interchange
Inexplicable of glories multiiform;
Now as the sullen sapphire swells toward storm
Foamless, their bitter beauty grew acold,
And now afire with ardour of fine gold.
Her flower-soft lips were meek and passionate,
For love upon them like a shadow sate
Patient, a foreseen vision of sweet things,
A dream with eyes fast shut and plumeless wings
That knew not what man's love or life should be,
Nor had it sight nor heart to hope or see
What thing should come, but childlike satisfied
Watched out its virgin vigil in soft pride
And unknissed expectation; and the glad
Clear cheeks and throat and tender temples had
Such maiden heat as if a rose's blood
Beat in the live heart of a lily-bud.

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

Between the small round breasts a white way led
Heavenward, and from slight foot to slender head
The whole fair body flower-like swayed and shone
Moving, and what her light hand leant upon
Grew blossom-scented: her warm arms began
To round and ripen for delight of man
That they should clasp and circle: her fresh hands,
Like regent lilies of reflowering lands
Whose vassal firstlings, crown and star and plume,
Bow down to the empire of that sovereign bloom,
Shone sceptreless, and from her face there went
A silent light as of a God content;
Save when, more swift and keen than love or shame,
Some flash of blood, light as the laugh of flame,
Broke it with sudden beam and shining speech,
As dream by dream shot through her eyes, and
each

Outshone the last that lightened, and not one
Showed her such things as should be borne and
done.

Though hard against her shone the sunlike face
That in all change and wreck of time and place
Should be the star of her sweet living soul.
Nor had love made it as his written scroll
For evil will and good to read in yet;
But smooth and mighty, without scar or fret,
Fresh and high-lifted was the helmless brow
As the oak-tree flower that tops the topmost bough,
Ere it drop off before the perfect leaf;
And nothing save his name he had of grief,
The name his mother, dying as he was born,
Made out of sorrow in very sorrow's scorn,

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

And set it on him smiling in her sight,
Tristram; who now, clothed with sweet youth and
might,

As a glad witness wore that bitter name,
The second symbol of the world for fame.
Famous and full of fortune was his youth
Ere the beard's bloom had left his cheek un-
smooth,

And in his face a lordship of strong joy
And height of heart no chance could curb or cloy
Lightened, and all that warmed them at his eyes
Loved them as larks that kindle as they rise
Toward light they turn to music love the blue strong
skies.

So like the morning through the morning moved
Tristram, a light to look on and be loved.

Song sprang between his lips and hands, and shone
Singing, and strengthened and sank down thereon

As a bird settles to the second flight,
Then from beneath his harping hands with might
Leapt, and made way and had its fill and died,

And all whose hearts were fed upon it sighed
Silent, and in them all the fire of tears
Burned as wine drunken not with lips but ears.

And gazing on his fervent hands that made
The might of music all their souls obeyed
With trembling strong subservience of delight,

Full many a maid that had him once in sight
Thought in the secret rapture of her heart

In how dark onset had these hands borne part
How oft, and were so young and sweet of skill;
And those red lips whereon the song burned still,

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

What words and cries of battle had they flung
Athwart the swing and shriek of swords, so young;
And eyes as glad as summer, what strange youth
Fed them so full of happy heart and truth,
That had seen sway from side to sundering side
The steel flow of that terrible springtide
That the moon rules not, but the fire and light
Of men's hearts mixed in the mid mirth of fight.
Therefore the joy and love of him they had
Made thought more amorous in them and more
glad

For his fame's sake remembered, and his youth
Gave his fame flowerlike fragrance and soft growth
As of a rose requickening, when he stood
Fair in their eye, a flower of faultless blood.
And that sad queen to whom his life was death,
A rose plucked forth of summer in mid breath,
A star fall'n out of season in mid throe
Of that life's joy that makes the star's life glow,
Made their love sadder toward him and more
strong.

And in mid change of time and fight and song
Chance cast him westward on the low sweet strand
Where songs are sung of the old green Irish land,
And the sky loves it, and the sea loves best,
And as a bird is taken to man's breast
The sweet-souled land where sorrow sweetest sings
Is wrapt round with them as with hands and wings
And taken to the sea's heart as a flower.
There in the luck and light of his good hour
Came to the king's court like a noteless man
Tristram, and while some half a season ran

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

Abode before him harping in his hall,
And taught sweet craft of new things musical
To the dear maiden mouth and innocent hands
That for his sake are famous in all lands.
Yet was not love between them, for their fate
Lay wrapt in its appointed hour at wait,
And had no flower to show yet, and no sting.
But once being vexed with some past wound the king
Bade give him comfort of sweet baths, and then
Should Iseult watch him as his handmaiden,
For his more honour in men's sight, and ease
The hurts he had with holy remedies
Made by her mother's magic in strange hours
Out of live roots and life-compelling flowers.
And finding by the wound's shape in his side
This was the knight by whom their strength had
died

And all their might in one man overthrown
Had left their shame in sight of all men shown,
She would have slain him swordless with his sword;
Yet seemed he to her so great and fair a lord
She heaved up hand and smote not; then said he,
Laughing—'What comfort shall this dead man be,
Damsel? what hurt is for my blood to heal?
But set your hand not near the toothèd steel
Lest the fang strike it.'—'Yea, the fang,' she said,
'Should it not sting the very serpent dead
That stung mine uncle? for his slayer art thou,
And half my mother's heart is bloodless now
Through thee, that mad'st the veins of all her kin
Bleed in his wounds whose veins through thee ran
thin.'

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

Yet thought she how their hot chief's violent heart
Had flung the fierce word forth upon their part
Which bade to battle the best knight that stood
On Arthur's, and so dying of his wild mood
Had set upon his conqueror's flesh the seal
Of his mishallowed and anointed steel,
Whereof the venom and enchanted might
Made the sign burn here branded in her sight.
These things she stood recasting, and her soul
Subsiding till its wound of wrath were whole
Grew smooth again, as thought still softening stole
Through all its tempered passion; nor might hate
Keep high the fire against him lit of late;
But softly from his smiling sight she passed.
And peace thereafter made between them fast
Made peace between two kingdoms, when he went
Home with hands reconciled and heart content,
To bring fair truce 'twixt Cornwall's wild bright
strand
And the long wrangling wars of that loud land.
And when full peace was struck betwixt them twain
Forth must he fare by those green straits again,
And bring back Iseult for a plighted bride
And set to reign at Mark his uncle's side.
So now with feast made and all triumphs done
They sailed between the moonfall and the sun
Under the spent stars eastward; but the queen
Out of wise heart and subtle love had seen
Such things as might be, dark as in a glass,
And lest some doom of these should come to pass
Bethought her with her secret soul alone.
To work some charm for marriage unison

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

And strike the heart of Iseult to her lord
With power compulsive more than stroke of sword.
Therefore with marvellous herbs and spells she
wrought
To win the very wonder of her thought,
And brewed it with her secret hands and blest
And drew and gave out of her secret breast
To one her chosen and Iseult's handmaiden,
Brangwain, and bade her hide from sight of men
This marvel covered in a golden cup,
So covering in her heart the counsel up
As in the gold the wondrous wine lay close;
And when the last shout with the last cup rose
About the bride and bridegroom bound to bed,
Then should this one word of her will be said
To her new-married maiden child, that she
Should drink with Mark this draught in unity,
And no lip touch it for her sake but theirs:
For with long love and consecrating prayers
The wine was hallowed for their mouths to pledge;
And if a drop fell from the beaker's edge
That drop should Iseult hold as dear as blood
Shed from her mother's heart to do her good.
And having drunk they twain should be one heart
Who were one flesh till fleshly death should part—
Death, who parts all. So Brangwain swore, and
kept
The hid thing by her while she waked or slept.
And now they sat to see the sun again
Whose light of eye had looked on no such twain
Since Galahault in the rose-time of the year
Brought Launcelot first to sight of Guenevere.

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

And Tristram caught her changing eyes and said:
"As this day raises daylight from the dead
Might not this face the life of a dead man?"

And Iseult, gazing where the sea was wan
Out of the sun's way, said: "I pray you not
Praise me, but tell me there in Camelot,
Saving the queen, who hath most name of fair?
I would I were a man and dwelling there,
That I might win me better praise than yours,
Even such as you have; for your praise endures,
That with great deeds ye wring from mouths of
men,

But ours—for shame, where is it? Tell me then,
Since woman may not wear a better here,
Who of this praise hath most save Guenevere?"

And Tristram, lightening with a laugh held in—
"Surely a little praise is this to win,
A poor praise and a little! but of these
Hapless, whom love serves only with bowed knees,
Of such poor women fairer face hath none
That lifts her eyes alive against the sun
Than Arthur's sister, whom the north seas call
Mistress of isles; so yet majestic
Above the crowns on younger heads she moves,
Outlightening with her eyes our late-born loves."

"Ah," said Iseult, "is she more tall than I?
Look, I am tall;" and struck the mast hard by,
With utmost upward reach of her bright hand;
"And look, fair lord, now, when I rise and stand,
How high with feet unlifted I can touch
Standing straight up; could this queen do thus
much?"

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

Nay, over tall she must be then, like me;
Less fair than lesser women. May this be,
That still she stands the second stateliest there,
So more than many so much younger fair,
She, born when yet the king your lord was not,
And has the third knight after Launcelot
And after you to serve her? nay, sir, then
God made her for a godlike sign to men."

"Ay," Tristram answered, "for a sign, a sign—
Would God it were not! for no planets shine
With half such fearful forecast of men's fate
As a fair face so more unfortunate."

Then with a smile that lit not on her brows
But moved upon her red mouth tremulous
Light as a sea-bird's motion oversea,
"Yea," quoth Iseult, "the happier hap for me,
With no such face to bring men no such fate.
Yet her might all we women born too late
Praise for good hap, who so enskied above
Not more in age excels us than man's love."

There came a glooming light on Tristram's face
Answering: "God keep you better in his grace
Than to sit down beside her in men's sight.
For if men be not blind whom God gives light
And lie not in whose lips he bids truth live,
Great grief shall she be given, and greater give.
For Merlin witnessed of her years ago
That she should work woe and should suffer woe
Beyond the race of women: and in truth
Her face, a spell that knows nor age nor youth,
Like youth being soft, and subtler-eyed than age,
With lips that mock the doom her eyes presage,

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

Hath on it such a light of cloud and fire,
With charm and change of keen or dim desire,
And over all a fearless look of fear
Hung like a veil across its changing cheer,
Made up of fierce foreknowledge and sharp scorn,
That it were better she had not been born.
For not love's self can help a face which hath
Such insubmissive anguish of wan wrath,
Blind prescience and self-contemptuous hate
Of her own soul and heavy-footed fate,
Writ broad upon its beauty: none the less
Its fire of bright and burning bitterness
Takes with as quick a flame the sense of men
As any sunbeam, nor is quenched again
With any drop of dewfall; yea, I think
No herb of force or blood-compelling drink
Would heal a heart that ever it made hot.
Ay, and men too that greatly love her not,
Seeing the great love of her and Lamoracke,
Make no great marvel, nor look strangely back
When with his gaze about her she goes by
Pale as a breathless and star-quickenning sky
Between moonrise and sunset, and moves out
Clothed with the passion of his eyes about
As night with all her stars, yet night is black;
And she, clothed warm with love of Lamoracke,
Girt with his worship as with girdling gold,
Seems all at heart anhungered and acold,
Seems sad at heart and loveless of the light,
As night, star-clothed or naked, is but night."

And with her sweet eyes sunken, and the mirth
Dead in their look as earth lies dead in earth

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

That reigned on earth and triumphed, Iseult said:
"Is it her shame of something done and dead
Or fear of something to be born and done
That so in her soul's eye puts out the sun?"

And Tristram answered: "Surely, as I think,
This gives her soul such bitterness to drink,
The sin born blind, the sightless sin unknown,
Wrought when the summer in her blood was blown
But scarce aflower, and spring first flushed her will
With bloom of dreams no fruitage should fulfil,
When out of vision and desire was wrought
The sudden sin that from the living thought
Leaps a live deed and dies not: then there came
On that blind sin swift eyesight like a flame
Touching the dark to death, and made her mad
With helpless knowledge that too late forbade
What was before the bidding: and she knew
How sore a life dead love should lead her through
To what sure end how fearful; and though yet
Nor with her blood nor tears her way be wet
And she look bravely with set face on fate,
Yet she knows well the serpent hour at wait
Somewhere to sting and spare not; ay, and he,
Arthur"——

"The king," quoth Iseult suddenly,
"Doth the king too live so in sight of fear?
They say sin touches not a man so near
As shame a woman; yet he too should be
Part of the penance, being more deep than she
Set in the sin."

"Nay," Tristram said, "for thus
It fell by wicked hap and hazardous,

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

That wittingly he sinned no more than youth
May sin and be assoiled of God and truth,
Repenting; since in his first year of reign
As he stood splendid with his foemen slain
And light of new-blown battles, flushed and hot
With hope and life, came greeting from King Lot
Out of his wind-worn islands oversea,
And homage to my king and fealty
Of those north seas wherein the strange shapes swim,
As from his man; and Arthur greeted him
As his good lord and courteously, and bade
To his high feast; who coming with him had
This Queen Morgause of Orkney, his fair wife,
In the green middle Maytime of her life,
And scarce in April was our king's as then,
And goodliest was he of all flowering men,
And of what graft as yet himself knew not;
But cold as rains in autumn was King Lot
And grey-grown out of season: so there sprang
Swift love between them, and all spring through sang
Light in their joyous hearing; for none knew
The bitter bond of blood between them two,
Twain fathers but one mother, till too late
The sacred mouth of Merlin set forth fate
And brake the secret seal on Arthur's birth,
And showed his ruin and his rule on earth
Inextricable, and light on lives to be.
For surely, though time slay us, yet shall we
Have such high name and lordship of good days
As shall sustain us living, and men's praise
Shall burn a beacon lit above us dead.
And of the king how shall not this be said

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

When any of us from any mouth has praise,
That such were men in only this king's days,
In Arthur's? yea, come shine or shade, no less
His name shall be one name with knightliness,
His fame one light with sunlight. Yet in sooth
His age shall bear the burdens of his youth
And bleed from his own bloodshed; for indeed
Blind to him blind his sister brought forth seed,
And of the child between them shall be born
Destruction: so shall God not suffer scorn,
Nor in men's souls and lives his law lie dead."

And as one moved and marvelling Iseult said:
"Great pity it is and strange it seems to me
God could not do them so much right as we,
Who slay not men for witless evil done;
And these the noblest under God's glad sun
For sin they knew not he that knew shall slay,
And smite blind men for stumbling in fair day.
What good is it to God that such should die?
Shall the sun's light grow sunnier in the sky
Because their light of spirit is clean put out?"

And sighing, she looked from wave to cloud
about,
And even with that the full-grown feet of day
Sprang upright on the quivering water-way,
And his face burned against her meeting face
Most like a lover's thrilled with great love's grace
Whose glance takes fire and gives; the quick sea
shone
And shivered like spread wings of angels blown
By the sun's breath before him; and a low
Sweet gale shook all the foam-flowers of thin snow

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

As into rainfall of sea-roses shed
Leaf by wild leaf on that green garden-bed
Which tempests till and sea-winds turn and plough:
For rosy and fiery round the running prow
Fluttered the flakes and feathers of the spray,
And bloomed like blossoms cast by God away
To waste on the ardent water; swift the moon
Withered to westward as a face in swoon
Death-stricken by glad tidings: and the height
Throbbled and the centre quivered with delight
And the depth quailed with passion as of love,
Till like the heart of some new-mated dove
Air, light, and wave seemed full of burning rest,
With motion as of one God's beating breast.

And her heart sprang in Iseult, and she drew
With all her spirit and life the sunrise through,
And through her lips the keen triumphant air
Sea-scented, sweeter than land-roses were,
And through her eyes the whole rejoicing east
Sun-satisfied, and all the heaven at feast
Spread for the morning; and the imperious mirth
Of wind and light that moved upon the earth,
Making the spring, and all the fruitful might
And strong regeneration of delight
That swells the seedling leaf and sapling man,
Since the first life in the first world began
To burn and burgeon through void limbs and veins,
And the first love with sharp sweet procreant pains
To pierce and bring forth roses; yea, she felt
Through her own soul the sovereign morning melt,
And all the sacred passion of the sun;
And as the young clouds flamed and were undone

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

About him coming, touched and burnt away
In rosy ruin and yellow spoil of day,
The sweet veil of her body and corporal sense
Felt the dawn also cleave it, and incense
With light from inward and with effluent heat
The kindling soul through fleshly hands and feet.
And as the august great blossom of the dawn
Burst, and the full sun scarce from sea withdrawn
Seemed on the fiery water a flower afloat,
So as a fire the mighty morning smote
Throughout her, and incensed with the influent
hour

Her whole soul's one great mystical red flower
Burst, and the bud of her sweet spirit broke
Rose-fashion, and the strong spring at a stroke
Thrilled, and was cloven, and from the full sheath
came

The whole rose of the woman red as flame:
And all her Mayday blood as from a swoon
Flushed, and May rose up in her and was June.
So for a space her heart as heavenward burned:
Then with half summer in her eyes she turned,
And on her lips was April yet, and smiled,
As though the spirit and sense unreconciled
Shrank laughing back, and would not ere its hour
Let life put forth the irrevocable flower.

And the soft speech between them grew again
With questionings and records of what men
Rose mightiest, and what names for love or fight
Shone starriest overhead of queen or knight.
Their Tristram spake of many a noble thing,
High feast and storm of tourney round the king,

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

Strange quest by perilous lands of marsh and brake
And circling woods branch-knotted like a snake
And places pale with sins that they had seen
Where was no life of red fruit or of green
But all was as a dead face wan and dun;
And bowers of evil builders whence the sun
Turns silent, and the moon holds hardly light
Above them through the sick and star-crossed night;
And of their hands through whom such holds lay
waste,

And all their strengths dishevelled and defaced
Fell ruinous, and were not from north to south:
And of the might of Merlin's ancient mouth,
The son of no man's loins, begot by doom
In speechless sleep out of a spotless womb;
For sleeping among graves where none had rest
And ominous houses of dead bones unblest
Among the grey grass rough as old rent hair
And wicked herbage whitening like despair
And blown upon with blasts of dolorous breath
From gaunt rare gaps and hollow doors of death,
A maid unspotted, senseless of the spell,
Felt not about her breathe some thing of hell
Whose child and hers was Merlin; and to him
Great light from God gave sight of all things dim
And wisdom of all wondrous things, to say
What root should bear what fruit of night or
day,

And sovereign speech and counsel higher than man;
Wherefore his youth like age was wise and wan,
And his age sorrowful and fain to sleep;
Yet should sleep never, neither laugh nor weep,

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

Till in some depth of deep sweet land or sea
The heavenly hands of holier Nimue,
That was the nurse of Launcelot, and most sweet
Of all that move with magical soft feet
Among us, being of lovelier blood and breath,
Should shut him in with sleep as kind as death:
For she could pass between the quick and dead:
And of her love toward Pelleas, for whose head
Love-wounded and world-wearied he had won
A place beyond all pain in Avalon;
And of the fire that wasted afterward
The loveless eyes and bosom of Ettarde,
In whose false love his faultless heart had burned;
And now being rapt from her, her lost heart yearned
To seek him, and passed hungering out of life:
And after all the thunder-hours of strife
That roared between King Claudas and King Ban
How Nimue's mighty nursling waxed to man,
And how from his first field such grace he got
That all men's hearts bowed down to Launcelot,
And how the high prince Galahault held him dear
And led him even to love of Guenevere
And to that kiss which made break forth as fire
The laugh that was the flower of his desire,
The laugh that lightened at her lips for bliss
To win from Love so great a lover's kiss:
And of the toil of Balen all his days
To reap, but thorns for fruit and tears for praise,
Whose hap was evil as his heart was good,
And all his works and ways by wold and wood
Led through much pain to one last labouring day
When blood for tears washed grief with life away:

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

And of the kin of Arthur, and their might;
The misborn head of Mordred, sad as night,
With cold waste cheeks and eyes as keen as pain,
And the close angry lips of Agravaine;
And gracious Gawain, scattering words as flowers,
The kindest head of worldly paramours;
And the fair hand of Gareth, found in fight
Strong as a sea-beast's tusches and as white;
And of the king's self, glorious yet and glad
For all the toil and doubt of doom he had,
Clothed with men's loves and full of kingly days.

Then Iseult said: "Let each knight have his
praise

And each good man good witness of his worth;
But when men laud the second name on earth,
Whom would they praise to have no worldly peer
Save him whose love makes glorious Guenevere?"

"Nay," Tristram said, "such man as he is none."

"What," said she, "there is none such under sun
Of all the large earth's living? yet I deemed
Men spake of one—but maybe men that dreamed,
Fools and tongue-stricken, witless, babbler's breed—
That for all high things was his peer indeed
Save this one highest, to be so loved and love."

And Tristram: "Little wit had these thereof;
For there is none such in the world as this."

"Ay, upon land," quoth Iseult, "none such is,
I doubt not, nor where fighting folk may be;
But were there none such between sky and sea,
The world's whole worth were poorer than I wist."

And Tristram took her flower-white hand and
kissed,

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

Laughing; and through his fair face as in shame
The light blood lightened. "Hear they no such
name?"

She said; and he, "If there be such a word,
I wot the queen's poor harper hath not heard."
Then, as the fuller-feathered hours grew long,
He holt to speed their warm slow feet with song.

"Love, is it morning risen or night deceased
That makes the mirth of this triumphant east?
Is it bliss given or bitterness put by
That makes most glad men's hearts at love's high feast?
Grief smiles, joy weeps, that day should live and die.

"Is it with soul's thirst or with body's drouth
That summer yearns out sunward to the south,
With all the flowers that when thy birth drew nigh
Were molten in one rose to make thy mouth?
O love, what care though day should live and die?

"Is the sun glad of all the love on earth,
The spirit and sense and work of things and worth?
Is the moon sad because the month must fly
And bring her death that can but bring back birth?
For all these things as day must live and die.

"Love, is it day that makes thee thy delight
Or thou that seest day made out of thy light?
Love, as the sun and sea are thou and I,
Sea without sun dark, sun without sea bright;
The sun is one though day should live and die.

"O which is elder, night or light, who knows?
And life or love, which first of these twain grows?
For life is born of love to wail and cry,
And love is born of life to heal his woes,
And light of night, that day should live and die.

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

"O sun of heaven above the worldly sea,
O very love, what light is this of thee!
My sea of soul is deep as thou art high,
But all thy light is shed through all of me,
As love's through love, while day shall live and die."

"Nay," said Iseult, "your song is hard to read."

"Ay?" said he: "or too light a song to heed,
Too slight to follow, it may be? Who shall sing
Of love but as a churl before a king
If by love's worth men rate his worthiness?
Yet as the poor churl's worth to sing is less,
Surely the more shall be the great king's grace
To show for churlish love a kindlier face."

"No churl," she said, "but one in soothsayer's
wise
Who tells but truths that help no more than lies.
I have heard men sing of love a simpler way
Than than wrought riddles made of night and
day,
Like jewelled reins whereon the rhyme-bells hang."
And Tristram smiled and changed his song and
sang.

"The breath between my lips of lips not mine,
Like spirit in sense that makes pure sense divine,
Is as life in them from the living sky
That entering fills my heart with blood of thine
And thee with me, while day shall live and die.

"Thy soul is shed into me with thy breath,
And in my heart each heartbeat of thee saith
How in thy life the lifesprings of me lie,
Even one life to be gathered of one death
In me and thee, though day may live and die.

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

"Ah, who knows now if in my veins it be
My blood that feels life sweet, or blood of thee,
And this thine eyesight kindled in mine eye
That shows me in thy flesh the soul of me,
For thine made mine, while day may live and die?

"Ah, who knows yet if one be twain or one,
And sunlight separable again from sun,
And I from thee with all my lifesprings dry,
And thou from me with all thine heartbeats done,
Dead separate souls while day shall live and die?

"I see my soul within thine eyes, and hear
My spirit in all thy pulses thrill with fear,
And in my lips the passion of thee sigh,
And music of me made in mine own ear;
Am I not thou while day shall live and die?

"Art thou not I as I thy love am thou?
So let all things pass from us; we are now,
For all that was and will be, who knows why?
And all that is and is not, who knows how?
Who knows? God knows why day should live and die."

And Iseult mused and spake no word, but sought
Through all the hushed ways of her tongueless
thought

What face or covered likeness of a face
In what veiled hour or dream-determined place
She seeing might take for love's face, and believe
This was the spirit to whom all spirits cleave.
For that sweet wonder of the twain made one
And each one twain, incorporate sun with sun,
Star with star molten, soul with soul imbued,
And all the soul's works, all their multitude,

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

Made one thought and one vision and one song,
Love—this thing, this, laid hand on her so strong
She could not choose but yearn till she should see.
So went she musing down her thoughts; but he,
Sweet-hearted as a bird that takes the sun
With clear strong eyes and feels the glad god run
Bright through his blood and wide rejoicing wings,
And opens all himself to heaven and sings,
Made her mind light and full of noble mirth
With words and songs the gladdest grown on earth,
Till she was blithe and high of heart as he.
So swam the Swallow through the springing sea.

And while they sat at speech as at a feast,
Came a light wind fast hardening forth of the east
And blackening till its might had marred the skies;
And the sea thrilled as with heart-sundering sighs
One after one drawn, with each breath it drew,
And the green hardened into iron blue,
And the soft light went out of all its face.
Then Tristram girt him for an oarsman's place
And took his oar and smote, and toiled with might
In the east wind's full face and the strong sea's spite
Labouring; and all the rowers rowed hard, but he
More mightily than any wearier three.
And Iseult watched him rowing with sinless eyes
That loved him but in holy girlish wise
For noble joy in his fair manliness
And trust and tender wonder; none the less
She thought if God had given her grace to be
Man, and make war on danger of earth and sea,
Even such a man she would be; for his stroke
Was mightiest as the mightier water broke,

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

And in sheer measure like strong music drave
Clean through the wet weight of the wallowing
wave;

And as a tune before a great king played
For triumph was the tune their strong strokes made,
And sped the ship through with smooth strife of
oars

Over the mid sea's grey foam-paven floors,
For all the loud breach of the waves at will.
So for an hour they fought the storm out still,
And the shorn foam spun from the blades, and high
The keel sprang from the wave-ridge, and the sky
Glared at them for a breath's space through the
rain;

Then the bows with a sharp shock plunged again
Down, and the sea clashed on them, and so rose
The bright stem like one panting from swift blows,
And as a swimmer's joyous beaten head
Rears itself laughing, so in that sharp stead
The light ship lifted her long quivering bows
As might the man his buffeted strong brows
Out of the wave-breach; for with one stroke yet
Went all men's oars together, strongly set
As to loud music, and with hearts uplift
They smote their strong way through the drench
and drift:

Till the keen hour had chafed itself to death
And the least wind fell fitfully, breath by breath,
Tired; and across the thin and slackening rain
Sprang the face southward of the sun again.
Then all they rested and were eased at heart;
And Iseult rose up where she sat apart,

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

And with her sweet soul deepening her deep eyes
Cast the furs from her and subtle embroideries
That wrapped her from the storming rain and spray,
And shining like all April in one day,
Hair, face, and throat dashed with the straying
showers,

She stood the first of all the whole world's flowers,
And laughed on Tristram with her eyes, and said,
"I too have heart then, I was not afraid."

And answering some light courteous word of grace
He saw her clear face lighten on his face
Unwittingly, with unenamoured eyes,
For the last time. A live man in such wise
Looks in the deadly face of his fixed hour
And laughs with lips wherein he hath no power
To keep the life yet some five minutes' space.
So Tristram looked on Iseult face to face
And knew not, and she knew not. The last time—
The last that should be told in any rhyme
Heard anywhere on mouths of singing men
That ever should sing praise of them again;
The last hour of their hurtless hearts at rest,
The last that peace should touch them, breast to
breast,

The last that sorrow far from them should sit,
This last was with them, and they knew not it.

For Tristram being athirst with toil now spake,
Saying, "Iseult, for all dear love's labour's sake
Give me to drink, and give me for a pledge
The touch of four lips on the beaker's edge."
And Iseult sought and would not wake Brangwain
Who slept as one half dead with fear and pain,

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

Being tender-natured; so with hushed light feet
Went Iseult round her, with soft looks and sweet
Pitying her pain; so sweet a spirited thing
She was, and daughter of a kindly king.
And spying what strange bright secret charge was
kept

Fast in that maid's white bosom while she slept,
She sought and drew the gold cup forth and smiled
Marvelling, with such light wonder as a child
That hears of glad sad life in magic lands;
And bare it back to Tristram with pure hands
Holding the love-draught that should be for flame
To burn out of them fear and faith and shame,
And lighten all their life up in men's sight,
And make them sad for ever. Then the knight
Bowed toward her and craved whence had she this
strange thing

That might be spoil of some dim Asian king,
By starlight stolen from some waste place of sands,
And a maid bore it here in harmless hands.
And Iseult, laughing—"Other lords that be
Feast, and their men feast after them; but we,
Our men must keep the best wine back to feast
Till they be full and we of all men least
Feed after them and fain to fare so well:
So with mine handmaid and your squire it fell
That hid this bright thing from us in a wile:"
And with light lips yet full of their swift smile,
And hands that wist not though they dug a grave,
Undid the hasps of gold, and drank, and gave,
And he drank after, a deep glad kingly draught:
And all their life changed in them, for they quaffed

THE SAILING OF THE SWALLOW

Death; if it be death so to drink, and fare
As men who change and are what these twain were.
And shuddering with eyes full of fear and fire
And heart-stung with a serpentine desire
He turned and saw the terror in her eyes
That yearned upon him shining in such wise
As a star midway in the midnight fixed.

 Their Galahault was the cup, and she that mixed;
Nor other hand there needed, nor sweet speech
To lure their lips together; each on each
Hung with strange eyes and hovered as a bird
Wounded, and each mouth trembled for a word;
Their heads neared, and their hands were drawn in
 one,

And they saw dark, though still the unsunken sun
Far through fine rain shot fire into the south;
And their four lips became one burning mouth.

THE QUEEN'S PLEASANCE

Out of the night arose the second day,
And saw the ship's bows break the shoreward spray.
As the sun's boat of gold and fire began
To sail the sea of heaven unsailed of man,
And the soft waves of sacred air to break
Round the prow launched into the morning's lake,
They saw the sign of their sea-travel done.

Ah, was not something seen of yester-sun
When the sweet light that lightened all the skies
Saw nothing fairer than one maiden's eyes,
That whatsoever in all time's years may be
To-day's sun nor to-morrow's sun shall see?
Not while she lives, not when she comes to die,
Shall she look sunward with that sinless eye.

Yet fairer now than song may show them stand
Tristram and Iseult, hand in amorous hand,
Soul-satisfied, their eyes made great and bright
With all the love of all the livelong night;
With all its hours yet singing in their ears
No mortal music made of thoughts and tears,
But such a song, past conscience of man's thought,
As hearing he grows god and knows it not.

THE QUEEN'S PLEASANCE

Nought else they saw nor heard but what the night
Had left for seal upon their sense and sight,
Sound of past pulses beating, fire of amorous light.
Enough, and overmuch, and never yet
Enough, though love still hungering feed and fret,
To fill the cup of night which dawn must overset.
For still their eyes were dimmer than with tears
And dizzier from diviner sounds their ears
Than though from choral thunders of the quiring
spheres.

They heard not how the landward waters rang,
Nor saw where high into the morning sprang,
Riven from the shore and bastioned with the sea,
Toward summits where the north wind's nest might
be,

A wave-walled palace with its eastern gate
Full of the sunrise now and wide at wait,
And on the mighty-moulded stairs that clomb
Sheer from the fierce lip of the lapping foam
The knights of Mark that stood before the wall.
So with loud joy and storm of festival
They brought the bride in up the towery way
That rose against the rising front of day,
Stair based on stair, between the rocks unhewn,
To those strange halls wherethrough the tidal tune
Rang loud or lower from soft or strengthening
sea,

Tower shouldering tower, to windward and to lee,
With change of floors and stories, flight on flight,
That clomb and curled up to the crowning height
Whence men might see wide east and west in one
And on one sea waned moon and mounting sun.

THE QUEEN'S PLEASANCE

And severed from the sea-rock's base, where stand
Some worn walls yet, they saw the broken strand,
The beachless cliff that in the sheer sea dips,
The sleepless shore inexorable to ships,
And the straight causeway's bare gaunt spine between
The sea-spanned walls and naked mainland's green.

On the mid stairs, between the light and dark,
Before the main tower's portal stood King Mark,
Crowned: and his face was as the face of one
Long time athirst and hungering for the sun
In barren thrall of bitter bonds, who now
Thinks here to feel its blessing on his brow.
A swart lean man, but kinglike, still of guise,
With black streaked beard and cold unquiet eyes,
Close-mouthed, gaunt-cheeked, wan as a morning
moon,

Though hardly time on his worn hair had strewn
The thin first ashes from a sparing hand:
Yet little fire there burnt upon the brand,
And way-worn seemed he with life's wayfaring.
So between shade and sunlight stood the king,
And his face changed nor yearned not toward his
bride;

But fixed between mild hope and patient pride
Abode what gift of rare or lesser worth
This day might bring to all his days on earth.
But at the glory of her when she came
His heart endured not: very fear and shame
Smote him, to take her by the hand and kiss,
Till both were molten in the burning bliss,
And with a thin flame flushing his cold face
He led her silent to the bridal place.

THE QUEEN'S PLEASANCE

There were they wed and hallowed of the priest;
And all the loud time of the marriage feast
One thought within three hearts was as a fire,
Where craft and faith took counsel with desire.
For when the feast had made a glorious end
They gave the new queen for her maids to tend
At dawn of bride-night, and thereafter bring
With marriage music to the bridegroom king.
Then by device of craft between them laid
To him went Brangwain delicately, and prayed
That this thing even for love's sake might not be,
But without sound or light or eye to see
She might come in to bride-bed: and he laughed,
As one that wist not well of wise love's craft,
And bade all bridal things be as she would.
Yet of his gentleness he gat not good;
For clothed and covered with the nuptial dark
Soft like a bride came Brangwain to King Mark,
And to the queen came Tristram; and the night
Fled, and ere danger of detective light
From the king sleeping Brangwain slid away,
And where had lain her handmaid Iseult lay.
And the king waking saw beside his head
That face yet passion-coloured, amorous red
From lips not his, and all that strange hair shed
Across the tissued pillows, fold on fold,
Innumerable, incomparable, all gold,
To fire men's eyes with wonder, and with love
Men's hearts; so shone its flowering crown above
The brows enwound with that imperial wreath,
And framed with fragrant radiance round the face
beneath.

THE QUEEN'S PLEASANCE

And the king marvelled, seeing with sudden
start

Her very glory, and said out of his heart:

“What have I done of good for God to bless
That all this he should give me, tress on tress,
All this great wealth and wondrous? Was it
this

That in mine arms I had all night to kiss,
And mix with me this beauty? this that seems
More fair than heaven doth in some tired saint's
dreams,

Being part of that same heaven? yea, more, for
he,

Though loved of God so, yet but seems to see,
But to me sinful such great grace is given
That in mine hands I hold this part of heaven,
Not to mine eyes lent merely. Doth God make
Such things so godlike for man's mortal sake?
Have I not sinned, that in this fleshly life
Have made of her a mere man's very wife?”

So the king mused and murmured; and she heard
The faint sound trembling of each breathless word,
And laughed into the covering of her hair.

And many a day for many a month as fair
Slid over them like music; and as bright
Burned with love's offerings many a secret night.
And many a dawn to many a fiery noon
Blew prelude, when the horn's heart-kindling tune
Lit the live woods with sovereign sound of mirth
Before the mightiest huntsman hailed on earth
Lord of its lordliest pleasure, where he rode
Hard by her rein whose peerless presence glowed

THE QUEEN'S PLEASANCE

Not as that white queen's of the virgin hunt
Once, whose crown-crescent braves the night-wind's
 brunt,

But with the sun for frontlet of a queenlier front.
For where the flashing of her face was turned
As lightning was the fiery light that burned
From eyes and brows enkindled more with speed
And rapture of the rushing of her steed
Than once with only beauty; and her mouth
Was as a rose athirst that pants for drouth
Even while it laughs for pleasure of desire,
And all her heart was as a leaping fire.
Yet once more joy they took of woodland ways
Than came of all those flushed and fiery days
When the loud air was mad with life and sound,
Through many a dense green mile, of horn and hound
Before the king's hunt going along the wind,
And ere the timely leaves were changed or thinned,
Even in mid maze of summer. For the knight
Forth was once ridden toward some frontier fight
Against the lewd folk of the Christless lands
That warred with wild and intermittent hands
Against the king's north border; and there came
A knight unchristened yet of unknown name,
Swart Palamede, upon a secret quest,
To high Tintagel, and abode as guest
In likeness of a minstrel with the king.
Nor was there man could sound so sweet a string,
Save Tristram only, of all held best on earth.
And one loud eve, being full of wine and mirth,
Ere sunset left the walls and waters dark,
To that strange minstrel strongly swore King Mark,

THE QUEEN'S PLEASANCE

By all that makes a knight's faith firm and strong,
That he for guerdon of his harp and song
Might crave and have his liking. Straight there
came

Up the swart cheek a flash of swarthier flame,
And the deep eyes fulfilled of glittering night
Laughed out in lightnings of triumphant light
As the grim harper spake: "O king, I crave
No gift of man that king may give to slave,
But this thy crowned queen only, this thy wife,
Whom yet unseen I loved, and set my life
On this poor chance to compass, even as here,
Being fairer famed than all save Guenevere."
Then as the noise of seaward storm that mocks
With roaring laughter from reverberate rocks
The cry from ships near shipwreck, harsh and high
Rose all the wrath and wonder in one cry
Through all the long roof's hollow depth and length
That hearts of strong men kindled in their strength
May speak in laughter lion-like, and cease,
Being wearied: only two men held their peace
And each glared hard on other: but King Mark
Spake first of these: "Man, though thy craft be
dark

And thy mind evil that begat this thing,
Yet stands the word once plighted of a king
Fast: and albeit less evil it were for me
To give my life up than my wife, or be
A landless man crowned only with a curse,
Yet this in God's and all men's sight were worse,
To live soul-shamed, a man of broken troth,
Abhorred of men as I abhor mine oath

THE QUEEN'S PLEASANCE

Which yet I may forswear not." And he bowed
His head, and wept: and all men wept aloud,
Save one, that heard him weeping: but the queen
Wept not: and statelier yet than eyes had seen
That ever looked upon her queenly state
She rose, and in her eyes her heart was great
And full of wrath seen manifest and scorn
More strong than anguish to go thence forlorn
Of all men's comfort and her natural right.
And they went forth into the dawn of night.
Long by wild ways and clouded light they rode,
Silent; and fear less keen at heart abode
With Iseult than with Palamede: for awe
Constrained him, and the might of love's high law,
That can make lewd men loyal; and his heart
Yearned on her, if perchance with amorous art
And soothfast skill of very love he might
For courtesy find favour in her sight
And comfort of her mercies: for he wist
More grace might come of that sweet mouth un-
kissed
Than joy for violence done it, that should make
His name abhorred for shame's disloyal sake.
And in the stormy starlight clouds were thinned
And thickened by short gusts of changing wind
That panted like a sick man's fitful breath:
And like a moan of lions hurt to death
Came the sea's hollow noise along the night.
But ere its gloom from aught but foam had light
They halted, being aweary: and the knight
As reverently forbore her where she lay
As one that watched his sister's sleep till day.

THE QUEEN'S PLEASANCE

Nor durst he kiss or touch her hand or hair
For love and shamefast pity, seeing how fair
She slept, and fenceless from the fitful air.
And shame at heart stung nigh to death desire,
But grief at heart burned in him like a fire
For hers and his own sorrowing sake, that had
Such grace for guerdon as makes glad men sad,
To have their will and want it. And the day
Sprang: and afar along the wild waste way
They heard the pulse and press of hurrying horse-
hoofs play:

And like the rushing of a ravenous flame
Whose wings make tempest of the darkness, came
Upon them headlong as in thunder borne
Forth of the darkness of the labouring morn
Tristram: and up forthright upon his steed
Leapt, as one blithe of battle, Palamede,
And mightily with shock of horse and man
They lashed together: and fair that fight began
As fair came up that sunrise: to and fro,
With knees nigh staggered and stout heads bent
low

From each quick shock of spears on either side,
Reeled the strong steeds heavily, haggard-eyed
And heartened high with passion of their pride
As sheer the stout spears shocked again, and flew
Sharp-splintering: then, his sword as each knight
drew,

They flashed and foined full royally, so long
That but to see so fair a strife and strong
A man might well have given out of his life
One year's void space forlorn of love or strife.

THE QUEEN'S PLEASANCE

As when a bright north-easter, great of heart,
Scattering the strengths of squadrons, hurls apart
Ship from ship labouring violently, in such toil
As earns but ruin—with even so strong recoil
Back were the steeds hurled from the spear-shock,
fain

And foiled of triumph: then with tightened rein
And stroke of spur, inveterate, either knight
Bore in again upon his foe with might,
Heart-hungry for the hot-mouthed feast of fight
And all athirst of mastery: but full soon
The jarring notes of that tempestuous tune
Fell, and its mighty music made of hands
Contending, clamorous through the loud waste lands,
Broke at once off; and shattered from his steed
Fell, as a mainmast ruining, Palamede,
Stunned: and those lovers left him where he lay,
And lightly through green lawns they rode away.

There was a bower beyond man's eye more fair
Than ever summer dews and sunniest air
Fed full with rest and radiance till the boughs
Had wrought a roof as for a holier house
Than aught save love might breathe in; fairer far
Than keeps the sweet light back of moon and
star

From high kings' chambers: there might love and
sleep

Divide for joy the darkling hours, and keep
With amorous alternation of sweet strife
The soft and secret ways of death and life
Made smooth for pleasure's feet to rest and run
Even from the moondawn to the kindling sun,

THE QUEEN'S PLEASANCE

Made bright for passion's feet to run and rest
Between the midnight's and the morning's breast,
Where hardly though her happy head lie down
It may forget the hour that wove its crown;
Where hardly though her joyous limbs be laid
They may forget the mirth that midnight made.
And thither, ere sweet night had slain sweet day,
Iseult and Tristram took their wandering way,
And rested, and refreshed their hearts with cheer
In hunters' fashion of the woods; and here
More sweet it seemed, while this might be, to dwell
And take of all world's weariness farewell
Than reign of all world's lordship queen and king.
Nor here would time for three moons' changes bring
Sorrow nor thought of sorrow; but sweet earth
Fostered them like her babes of eldest birth,
Reared warm in pathless woods and cherished well.
And the sun sprang above the sea and fell,
And the stars rose and sank upon the sea;
And outlaw-like, in forest wise and free,
The rising and the setting of their lights
Found those twain dwelling all those days and nights.
And under change of sun and star and moon
Flourished and fell the chaplets woven of June,
And fair through fervours of the deepening sky
Panted and passed the hours that lit July,
And each day blessed them out of heaven above,
And each night crowned them with the crown of love.
Nor till the might of August overhead
Weighed on the world was yet one roseleaf shed
Of all their joy's warm coronal, nor aught
Touched them in passing ever with a thought

THE QUEEN'S PLEASANCE

That ever this might end on any day
Or any night not love them where they lay;
But like a babbling tale of barren breath
Seemed all report and rumour held of death,
And a false bruit the legend tear-impearled
That such a thing as change was in the world.
And each bright song upon his lips that came,
Mocking the powers of change and death by name,
Blasphemed their bitter godhead, and defied
Time, though clothed round with ruin as kings with
pride,

To blot the glad life out of love: and she
Drank lightly deep of his philosophy
In that warm wine of amorous words which is
Sweet with all truths of all philosophies.
For well he wist all subtle ways of song,
And in his soul the secret eye was strong
That burns in meditation, till bright words
Break flamelike forth as notes from fledgeling birds
That feel the soul speak through them of the spring.
So fared they night and day as queen and king
Crowned of a kingdom wide as day and night.
Nor ever cloudlet swept or swam in sight
Across the darkling depths of their delight
Whose stars no skill might number, nor man's art
Sound the deep stories of its heavenly heart.
Till, even for wonder that such life should live,
Desires and dreams of what death's self might give
Would touch with tears and laughter and wild speech
The lips and eyes of passion, fain to reach,
Beyond all bourne of time or trembling sense,
The verge of love's last possible eminence.

THE QUEEN'S PLEASANCE

Out of the heaven that storm nor shadow mars,
Deep from the starry depth beyond the stars,
A yearning ardour without scope or name
Fell on them, and the bright night's breath of flame
Shot fire into their kisses; and like fire
The lit dewes lightened on the leaves, as higher
Night's heart beat on toward midnight. Far and
fain

Somewhiles the soft rush of rejoicing rain
Solaced the darkness, and from steep to steep
Of heaven they saw the sweet sheet lightning leap
And laugh its heart out in a thousand smiles,
When the clear sea for miles on glimmering miles
Burned as though dawn were strewn abroad astray,
Or, showering out of heaven, all heaven's array
Had paven instead the waters: fain and far
Somewhiles the burning love of star for star
Spake words that love might wellnigh seem to hear
In such deep hours as turn delight to fear
Sweet as delight's self ever. So they lay
Tranced once, nor watched along the fiery bay
The shine of summer darkness palpitae and play.
She had nor sight nor voice; her swooning eyes
Knew not if night or light were in the skies;
Across her beauty sheer the moondawn shed
Its light as on a thing as white and dead;
Only with stress of soft fierce hands she prest
Between¹the throbbing blossoms of her breast
His ardent face, and through his hair her breath
Went quivering as when life is hard on death;
And with strong trembling fingers she strained fast
His head into her bosom; till at last,

THE QUEEN'S PLEASANCE

Satiate with sweetness of that burning bed,
His eyes afire with tears, he raised his head
And laughed into her lips; and all his heart
Filled hers; then face from face fell, and apart
Each hung on each with panting lips, and felt
Sense into sense and spirit in spirit melt.

"Hast thou no sword? I would not live till day;
O love, this night and we must pass away,
It must die soon, and let not us die late."

"Take then my sword and slay me; nay, but wait
Till day be risen; what, wouldst thou think to die
Before the light take hold upon the sky?"

"Yea, love; for how shall we have twice, being
twain,
This very night of love's most rapturous reign?
Live thou and have thy day, and year by year
Be great, but what shall I be? Slay me here;
Let me die not when love lies dead, but now
Strike through my heart: nay, sweet, what heart
hast thou?

Is it so much I ask thee, and spend my breath
In asking? nay, thou knowest it is but death.
Hadst thou true heart to love me, thou wouldst
give

This: but for hate's sake thou wilt let me live."

Here he caught up her lips with his, and made
The wild prayer silent in her heart that prayed,
And strained her to him till all her faint breath
sank

And her bright light limbs palpitated and shrank
And rose and fluctuated as flowers in rain
That bends them and they tremble and rise again

THE QUEEN'S PLEASANCE

And heave and straighten and quiver all through
with bliss

And turn afresh their mouths up for a kiss,
Amorous, athirst of that sweet influent love;
So, hungering towards his hovering lips above,
Her red-rose mouth yearned silent, and her eyes
Closed, and flashed after, as through June's darkest
skies

The divine heartbeats of the deep live light
Make open and shut the gates of the outer night.

Long lay they still, subdued with love, nor knew
If cloud or light changed colour as it grew,
If star or moon beheld them; if above
The heaven of night waxed fiery with their love,
Or earth beneath were moved at heart and root
To burn as they, to burn and bring forth fruit
Unseasonable for love's sake; if tall trees
Bowed, and close flowers yearned open, and the
breeze

Failed and fell silent as a flame that fails:
And all that hour unheard the nightingales
Clamoured, and all the woodland soul was stirred,
And depth and height were one great song un-
heard,

As though the world caught music and took fire
From the instant heart alone of their desire.

So sped their night of nights between them: so,
For all fears past and shadows, shine and snow,
That one pure hour all-golden where they lay
Made their life perfect and their darkness day.
And warmer waved its harvest yet to reap,
Till in the lovely fight of love and sleep

THE QUEEN'S PLEASANCE

At length had sleep the mastery; and the dark
Was lit with soft live gleams they might not
mark,

Fleet butterflies, each like a dead flower's ghost,
White, blue, and sere leaf-coloured; but the most
White as the sparkle of snow-flowers in the sun
Ere with his breath they lie at noon undone
Whose kiss devours their tender beauty, and leaves
But raindrops on the grass and sere thin leaves
That were engraven with traceries of the snow
Flowerwise ere any flower of earth's would blow;
So swift they sprang and sank, so sweet and light
They swam the deep dim breathless air of night.
Now on her rose-white amorous breast half bare,
Now on her slumberous love-dishevelled hair,
The white wings lit and vanished, and afresh
Lit soft as snow lights on her snow-soft flesh,
On hand or throat or shoulder; and she stirred
Sleeping, and spake some tremulous bright word,
And laughed upon some dream too sweet for truth,
Yet not so sweet as very love and youth
That there had charmed her eyes to sleep at last.
Nor woke they till the perfect night was past,
And the soft sea thrilled with blind hope of light.
But ere the dusk had well the sun in sight
He turned and kissed her eyes awake and said,
Seeing earth and water neither quick nor dead
And twilight hungering toward the day to be,
"As the dawn loves the sunlight I love thee."
And even as rays with cloudlets in the skies
Confused in brief love's bright contentious wise,
Sleep strove with sense rekindling in her eyes;

THE QUEEN'S PLEASANCE

And as the flush of birth scarce overcame
The pale pure pearl of unborn light with flame
Soft as may touch the rose's heart with shame
To break not all reluctant out of bud,
Stole up her sleeping cheek her waking blood;
And with the lovely laugh of love that takes
The whole soul prisoner ere the whole sense wakes,
Her lips for love's sake bade love's will be done
And all the sea lay subject to the sun.

TRISTRAM IN BRITTANY

“‘As the dawn loves the sunlight I love thee;’
As men that shall be swallowed of the sea
Love the sea’s lovely beauty; as the night
That wanes before it loves the young sweet light,
And dies of loving; as the worn-out noon
Loves twilight, and as twilight loves the moon
That on its grave a silver seal shall set—
We have loved and slain each other, and love yet.
Slain; for we live not surely, being in twain:
In her I lived, and in me she is slain,
Who loved me that I brought her to her doom,
Who loved her that her love might be my tomb.
As all the streams on earth and all fresh springs
And sweetest waters, every brook that sings,
Each fountain where the young year dips its wings
First, and the first-fledged branches of it wave,
Even with one heart’s love seek one bitter grave.
From hills that first see bared the morning’s breast
And heights the sun last yearns to from the west,
All tend but toward the sea, all born most high
Strive downward, passing all things joyous by,
Seek to it and cast their lives in it and die.

TRISTRAM IN BRITTANY

So strive all lives for death which all lives win;
So sought her soul to my soul, and therein
Was poured and perished: O my love, and mine
Sought to thee and died of thee and died as thine.
As the dawn loves the sunlight that must cease
Ere dawn again may rise and pass in peace;
Must die that she being dead may live again,
To be by his new rising newly slain.
So rolls the great wheel of the great world round,
And no change in it and no fault is found,
And no true life of perdurable breath,
And surely no irrevocable death.
Day after day night comes that day may break,
And day comes back for night's reiterate sake.
Each into each dies, each of each is born:
Day past is night, shall night past not be morn?
Out of this moonless and faint-hearted night
That love yet lives in, shall there not be light?
Light strong as love, that love may live in yet?
Alas, but how shall foolish hope forget
How all these loving things that kill and die
Meet not but for a breath's space and pass by?
Night is kissed once of dawn and dies, and day
But touches twilight and is rapt away.
So may my love and her love meet once more,
And meeting be divided as of yore.
Yea, surely as the day-star loves the sun
And when he hath risen is utterly undone,
So is my love of her and hers of me—
And its most sweetness bitter as the sea.
Would God yet dawn might see the sun and die!"

Three years had looked on earth and passed it by

TRISTRAM IN BRITTANY

Since Tristram looked on Iseult, when he stood
So communing with dreams of evil and good,
And let all sad thoughts through his spirit sweep
As leaves through air or tears through eyes that weep
Or snowflakes through dark weather: and his soul,
That had seen all those sightless seasons roll
One after one, wave over weary wave,
Was in him as a corpse is in its grave.
Yet, for his heart was mighty, and his might
Through all the world as a great sound and light,
The mood was rare upon him; save that here
In the low sundawn of the lightening year
With all last year's toil and its triumph done
He could not choose but yearn for that set sun
Which at this season saw the firstborn kiss
That made his lady's mouth one fire with his.
Yet his great heart being greater than his grief
Kept all the summer of his strength in leaf
And all the rose of his sweet spirit in flower;
Still his soul fed upon the sovereign hour
That had been or that should be; and once more
He looked through drifted sea and drifting shore
That crumbled in the wave-breach, and again
Spake sad and deep within himself: "What pain
Should make a man's soul wholly break and die,
Sapped as weak sand by water? How shall I
Be less than all less things are that endure
And strive and yield when time is? Nay, full sure
All these and we are parts of one same end;
And if through fire or water we twain tend
To that sure life where both must be made one,
If one we be, what matter? Thou, O sun,

TRISTRAM IN BRITTANY

The face of God, if God thou be not—nay,
What but God should I think thee, what should
say,

Seeing thee rerisen, but very God?—should I,
I fool, rebuke thee sovereign in thy sky,
The clouds dead round thee and the air alive,
The winds that lighten and the waves that strive
Toward this shore as to that beneath thy breath,
Because in me my thoughts bear all towards death?
O sun, that when we are dead wilt rise as bright,
Air deepening up toward heaven, and nameless light,
And heaven immeasurable, and faint clouds blown
Between us and the lowest aerial zone
And each least skirt of their imperial state—
Forgive us that we held ourselves so great!
What should I do to curse you? I indeed
Am a thing meaner than this least wild weed
That my foot bruises and I know not—yet
Would not be mean enough for worms to fret
Before their time and mine was.

“Ah, and ye
Light washing weeds, blind waifs of dull blind sea,
Do ye so thirst and hunger and aspire,
Are ye so moved with such long strong desire
In the ebb and flow of your sad life, and strive
Still toward some end ye shall not see alive—
But at high noon ye know it by light and heat
Some half-hour, till ye feel the fresh tide beat
Up round you, and at night's most bitter noon
The ripples leave you naked to the moon?
And this dim dusty heather that I tread,
These half-born blossoms, born at once and dead,

TRISTRAM IN BRITTANY

Sere brown as funeral cloths, and purple as pall,
What if some life and grief be in them all?

“Ay, what of these? but, O strong sun! O sea!
I bid not you, divine things! comfort me,
I stand not up to match you in your sight—
Who hath said ye have mercy toward us, ye who
have might?

And though ye had mercy, I think I would not pray
That ye should change your counsel or your way
To make our life less bitter: if such power
Be given the stars on one deciduous hour,
And such might be in planets to destroy
Grief and rebuild, and break and build up joy,
What man would stretch forth hand on them to make
Fate mutable, God foolish, for his sake?
For if in life or death be aught of trust,
And if some unseen just God or unjust
Put soul into the body of natural things
And in time's pauseless feet and worldwide wings
Some spirit of impulse and some sense of will
That steers them through the seas of good and ill
To some incognizable and actual end,
Be it just or unjust, foe to man or friend,
How should we make the stable spirit to swerve,
How teach the strong soul of the world to serve,
The imperious will in time and sense in space
That gives man life turn back to give man place—
The conscious law lose conscience of its way,
The rule and reason fail from night and day,
The streams flow back toward whence the springs
began,

That less of thirst might sear the lips of man?

TRISTRAM IN BRITTANY

Let that which is be, and sure strengths stand sure,
And evil or good and death or life endure,
Not alterable and rootless, but indeed
A very stem born of a very seed
That brings forth fruit in season: how should this
Die that was sown, and that not be which is,
And the old fruit change that came of the ancient
root,

And he that planted bid it not bear fruit,
And he that watered smite his vine with drouth
Because its grapes are bitter in our mouth,
And he that kindled quench the sun with night
Because its beams are fire against our sight,
And he that tuned untune the sounding spheres
Because their song is thunder in our ears?
How should the skies change and the stars, and time
Break the large concord of the years that chime,
Answering, as wave to wave beneath the moon
That draws them shoreward, mar the whole tide's
tune

For the instant foam's sake on one turning wave—
For man's sake that is grass upon a grave?
How should the law that knows not soon or late,
For whom no time nor space is—how should fate,
That is not good nor evil, wise nor mad,
Nor just nor unjust, neither glad nor sad—
How should the one thing that hath being, the one
That moves not as the stars move or the sun
Or any shadow or shape that lives or dies
In likeness of dead earth or living skies,
But its own darkness and its proper light
Clothe it with other names than day or night,

TRISTRAM IN BRITTANY

And its own soul of strength and spirit of breath
Feed it with other powers than life or death—
How should it turn from its great way to give
Man that must die a clearer space to live?
Why should the waters of the sea be cleft,
The hills be molten to his right and left,
That he from deep to deep might pass dry-shod,
Or look between the viewless heights on God?
Hath he such eyes as, when the shadows flee,
The sun looks out with to salute the sea?
Is his hand bounteous as the morning's hand?
Or where the night stands hath he feet to stand?
Will the storm cry not when he bids it cease?
Is it his voice that saith to the east wind, Peace?
Is his breath mightier than the west wind's breath?
Doth his heart know the things of life and death?
Can his face bring forth sunshine and give rain,
Or his weak will that dies and lives again
Make one thing certain or bind one thing fast,
That as he willed it shall be at the last?
How should the storms of heaven and kindled lights
And all the depths of things and topless heights
And air and earth and fire and water change
Their likeness, and the natural world grow strange,
And all the limits of their life undone
Lose count of time and conscience of the sun,
And that fall under which was fixed above,
That man might have a larger hour for love?"

So musing with close lips and lifted eyes
That smiled with self-contempt to live so wise,
With silent heart so hungry now so long,
So late grown clear, so miserably made strong,

TRISTRAM IN BRITTANY

About the wolds a banished man he went,
The brown wolds bare and sad as banishment,
By wastes of fruitless flowerage, and grey downs
That felt the sea-wind shake their wild-flower
crowns

As though fierce hands would pluck from some grey
head

The spoils of majesty despised and dead,
And fill with crying and comfortless strange sound
Their hollow sides and heights of herbless ground.
Yet as he went fresh courage on him came,
Till dawn rose too within him as a flame;
The heart of the ancient hills and his were one;
The winds took counsel with him, and the sun
Spake comfort; in his ears the shout of birds
Was as the sound of clear sweet-spirited words,
The noise of streams as laughter from above
Of the old wild lands, and as a cry of love
Spring's trumpet-blast blown over moor and lea:
The skies were red as love is, and the sea
Was as the floor of heaven for love to tread.
So went he as with light about his head,
And in the joyous travail of the year
Grew April-hearted; since nor grief nor fear
Can master so a young man's blood so long
That it shall move not to the mounting song
Of that sweet hour when earth replumes her wings
And with fair face and heart set heavenward sings
As an awakened angel unaware
That feels his sleep fall from him, and his hair
By some new breath of wind and music stirred,
Till like the sole song of one heavenly bird

TRISTRAM IN BRITTANY

Sounds all the singing of the host of heaven,
And all the glories of the sovereign Seven
Are as one face of one incorporate light.
And as that host of singers in God's sight
Might draw toward one that slumbered, and arouse
The lips requickened and rekindling brows,
So seemed the earthly host of all things born
In sight of spring and eyeshot of the morn,
All births of land or waifs of wind and sea,
To draw toward him that sorrowed, and set free
From presage and remembrance of all pains
The life that leapt and lightened in his veins.
So with no sense abashed nor sunless look,
But with exalted eyes and heart, he took
His part of sun or storm-wind, and was glad,
For all things lost, of these good things he had.

And the spring loved him surely, being from birth
One made out of the better part of earth,
A man born as at sunrise; one that saw
Not without reverence and sweet sense of awe
But wholly without fear or fitful breath
The face of life watched by the face of death;
And living took his fill of rest and strife,
Of love and change, and fruit and seed of life,
And when his time to live in light was done
With unbent head would pass out of the sun:
A spirit as morning, fair and clear and strong,
Whose thought and work were as one harp and song
Heard through the world as in a strange king's hall
Some great guest's voice that sings of festival.
So seemed all things to love him, and his heart
In all their joy of life to take such part,

TRISTRAM IN BRITTANY

That with the live earth and the living sea
He was as one that communed mutually
With naked heart to heart of friend to friend:
And the star deepening at the sunset's end,
And the moon fallen before the gate of day
As one sore wearied with vain length of way,
And the winds wandering, and the streams and
skies,

As faces of his fellows in his eyes.
Nor lacked there love where he was evermore
Of man and woman, friend of sea or shore,
Not measurable with weight of graven gold,
Free as the sun's gift of the world to hold
Given each day back to man's reconquering sight
That loses but its lordship for a night.
And now that after many a season spent
In barren ways and works of banishment,
Toil of strange fights and many a fruitless field,
Ventures of quest and vigils under shield,
He came back to the strait of sundering sea
That parts green Cornwall from grey Brittany,
Where dwelt the high king's daughter of the lands,
Iseult, named alway from her fair white hands,
She looked on him and loved him; but being
young

Made shamefastness a seal upon her tongue,
And on her heart, that none might hear its cry,
Set the sweet signet of humility.
Yet when he came a stranger in her sight,
A banished man and weary, no such knight
As when the Swallow dipped her bows in foam
Steered singing that imperial Iseult home,

TRISTRAM IN BRITTANY

This maiden with her sinless sixteen years
Full of sweet thoughts and hopes that played at fears
Cast her eyes on him but in courteous wise,
And lo, the man's face burned upon her eyes
As though she had turned them on the naked sun:
And through her limbs she felt sweet passion run
As fire that flowed down from her face, and beat
Soft through stirred veins on even to her hands and
feet

As all her body were one heart on flame,
Athrob with love and wonder and sweet shame.
And when he spake there sounded in her ears
As 'twere a song out of the graves of years
Heard, and again forgotten, and again
Remembered with a rapturous pulse of pain.
But as the maiden mountain snow sublime
Takes the first sense of April's trembling time
Soft on a brow that burns not though it blush
To feel the sunrise hardly half aflush,
So took her soul the sense of change, nor thought
That more than maiden love was more than nought.
Her eyes went hardly after him, her cheek
Grew scarce a goodlier flower to hear him speak,
Her bright mouth no more trembled than a rose
May for the least wind's breathless sake that blows
Too soft to sue save for a sister's kiss,
And if she sighed in sleep she knew not this.
Yet in her heart hovered the thoughts of things
Past, that with lighter or with heavier wings
Beat round about her memory, till it burned
With grief that brightened and with hope that
yearned,

TRISTRAM IN BRITTANY

Seeing him so great and sad, nor knowing what
fate

Had bowed and crowned a head so sad and great.

Nor might she guess but little, first or last,
Though all her heart so hung upon his past,
Of what so bowed him for what sorrow's sake:

For scarce of aught at any time he spake

That from his own land oversea had sent

His lordly life to barren banishment.

Yet still or soft or keen remembrance clung

Close round her of the least word from his tongue

That fell by chance of courtesy, to greet

With grace of tender thanks her pity, sweet

As running streams to men's way-wearied feet.

And when between strange words her name would
fall,

Suddenly straightway to that lure's recall

Back would his heart bound as the falconer's bird,

And tremble and bow down before the word.

"Iseult"—and all the cloudlike world grew flame,

And all his heart flashed lightning at her name;

"Iseult"—and all the wan waste weary skies

Shone as his queen's own love-enkindled eyes.

And seeing the bright blood in his face leap up

As red wine mantling in a royal cup

To hear the sudden sweetness of the sound

Ring, but ere well his heart had time to bound

His cheek would change, and grief bow down his
head,

"Haply," the girl's heart, though she spake not,
said,

"This name of mine was worn of one long dead,

TRISTRAM IN BRITTANY

Some sister that he loved:" and therewithal
Would pity bring her heart more deep in thrall.
But once, when winds about the world made mirth,
And March held revel hard on April's birth
Till air and sea were jubilant as earth,
Delight and doubt in sense and soul began,
And yearning of the maiden toward the man,
Harping on high before her: for his word
Was fire that kindled in her heart that heard,
And alway through the rhymes reverberate came
The virginal soft burden of her name.
And ere the full song failed upon her ear
Joy strove within her till it cast out fear,
And all her heart was as his harp, and rang
Swift music, made of hope whose birthnote sprang
Bright in the blood that kindled as he sang.

"Stars know not how we call them, nor may flowers
Know by what happy name the hovering hours
Baptize their new-born heads with dew and flame:
And Love, adored of all time as of ours,
Iseult, knew nought for ages of his name.

"With many tongues men called on him, but he
Wist not which word of all might worthiest be
To sound for ever in his ear the same,
Till heart of man might hear and soul might see,
Iseult, the radiance ringing from thy name.

"By many names men called him, as the night
By many a name calls many a starry light,
* Her several sovereigns of dividual fame;
But day by one name only calls aright,
Iseult, the sun that bids men praise his name.

TRISTRAM IN BRITTANY

"In many a name of man his name soared high
And song shone round it soaring, till the sky
Rang rapture, and the world's fast-founded frame
Trembled with sense of triumph, even as I,
Iseult, with sense of worship at thy name.

"In many a name of woman smiled his power
Incarnate, as all summer in a flower,
Till winter bring forgetfulness or shame:
But thine, the keystone of his topless tower,
Iseult, is one with Love's own lordliest name.

"Iseult my love, Iseult my queen twice crowned,
In thee my death, in thee my life lies bound:
Names are there yet that all men's hearts acclaim,
But Love's own heart rings answer to the sound,
Iseult, that bids it bow before thy name."

There ceased his voice yearning upon the word,
Struck with strong passion dumb: but she that
heard

Quailed to the heart, and trembled ere her eyes
Durst let the loving light within them rise,
And yearn on his for answer: yet at last,
Albeit not all her fear was overpast,
Hope, kindling even the frost of fear apace
With sweet fleet bloom and breath of gradual grace,
Flushed in the changing roses of her face.
And ere the strife took truce of white with red,
Or joy for soft shame's sake durst lift up head,
Something she would and would not fain have said,
And wist not what the fluttering word would be,
But rose and reached forth to him her hand: and he,
Heart-stricken, bowed his head and dropped his
knee,

TRISTRAM IN BRITTANY

And on her fragrant hand his lips were fire;
And their two hearts were as one trembling lyre
Touched by the keen wind's kiss with brief desire
And music shuddering at its own delight.
So dawned the moonrise of their marriage night.

IV

THE MAIDEN MARRIAGE

SPRING watched her last moon burn and fade with
May

While the days deepened toward a bridal day.
And on her snowbright hand the ring was set
While in the maiden's ear the song's word yet
Hovered, that hailed as love's own queen by name
Iseult: and in her heart the word was flame;
A pulse of light, a breath of tender fire,
Too dear for doubt, too driftless for desire.
Between her father's hand and brother's led
From hall to shrine, from shrine to marriage-bed,
She saw not how by hap at home-coming
Fell from her new lord's hand a royal ring,
Whereon he looked, and felt the pulse astart
Speak passion in his faith-forsaken heart.
For this was given him of the hand wherein
That heart's pledge lay for ever: so the sin
That should be done if truly he should take
This maid to wife for strange love's faithless sake
Struck all his mounting spirit abashed, and fear
Fell cold for shame's sake on his changing cheer.
Yea, shame's own fire that burned upon his brow
To bear the brand there of a broken vow

THE MAIDEN MARRIAGE

Was frozen again for very fear thereof
That wrung his heart with keener pangs than love.
And all things rose upon him, all things past
Ere last they parted, cloven in twain at last,
Iseult from Tristram, Tristram from the queen;
And how men found them in the wild woods green
Sleeping, but sundered by the sword between,
Dividing breast from amorous breast a span,
But scarce in heart the woman from the man
As far as hope from joy or sleep from truth,
And Mark that saw them held for sacred sooth
These were no fleshly lovers, by that sign
That severed them, still slumbering; so divine
He deemed it: how at waking they beheld
The king's folk round the king, and uncompelled
Were fain to follow and fare among them home
Back to the towers washed round with rolling foam
And storied halls wherethrough sea-music rang:
And how report thereafter swelled and sprang,
A full-mouthed serpent, hissing in men's ears
Word of their loves: and one of all his peers
That most he trusted, being his kinsman born,
A man base-moulded for the stamp of scorn,
Whose heart with hate was keen and cold and dark,
Gave note by midnight whisper to King Mark
Where he might take them sleeping; how ere day
Had seen the grim next morning all away
Fast bound they brought him down a weary way
With forty knights about him, and their chief
That traitor who for trust had given him grief,
To the old hoar chapel, like a strait stone tomb
Sheer on the sea-rocks, there to take his doom:

THE MAIDEN MARRIAGE

How, seeing he needs must die, he bade them yet
Bethink them if they durst for shame forget
What deeds for Cornwall had he done, and wrought
For all their sake what rescue, when he fought
Against the fierce foul Irish foe that came
To take of them for tribute in their shame
Three hundred heads of children; whom in fight
His hand redeeming slew Moraunt the knight
That none durst lift his eyes against, not one
Had heart but he, who now had help of none,
To take the battle; whence great shame it were
To knighthood, yea, foul shame on all men there,
To see him die so shamefully: nor durst
One man look up, nor one make answer first,
Save even the very traitor, who defied
And would have slain him naked in his pride,
But he, that saw the sword plucked forth to slay,
Looked on his hands, and wrenched their bonds
away,

Haling those twain that he went bound between
Suddenly to him, and kindling in his mien
Shone lion-fashion forth with eyes alight,
And lion-wise leapt on that kinsman knight
And wrung forth of his felon hands with might
The sword that should have slain him weaponless,
And smote him sheer down: then came all the press
All raging in upon him; but he wrought
So well for his deliverance as they fought
That ten strong knights rejoicingly he slew,
And took no wound, nor wearied: then the crew
Waxed greater, and their cry on him; but he
Had won the chapel now above the sea

THE MAIDEN MARRIAGE

That chafed right under: then the heart in him
Sprang, seeing the low cliff clear to leap, and swim
Right out by the old blithe way the sea-mew takes
Across the bounding billow-belt that breaks
For ever, but the loud bright chain it makes
To bind the bridal bosom of the land
Time shall unlink not ever, till his hand
Fall by its own last blow dead: thence again
Might he win forth into the green great main
Far on beyond, and there yield up his breath
At least, with God's will, by no shameful death,
Or haply save himself, and come anew
Some long day later, ere sweet life were through.
And as the sea-gull hovers high, and turns
With eyes wherein the keen heart glittering yearns
Down toward the sweet green sea whereon the broad
 noon burns,
And suddenly, soul-stricken with delight,
Drops, and the glad wave gladdens, and the light
Sees wing and wave confuse their fluttering white,
So Tristram one brief breathing-space apart
Hung, and gazed down; then with exulting heart
Plunged: and the fleet foam round a joyous head
Flashed, that shot under, and ere a shaft had sped
Rose again radiant, a rejoicing star,
And high along the water-ways afar
Triumphed: and all they deemed he needs must
 die;
But Gouvernayle his squire, that watched hard by,
Sought where perchance a man might win ashore,
Striving, with strong limbs labouring long and
 sore,

THE MAIDEN MARRIAGE

And there abode an hour: till as from fight
Crowned with hard conquest won by mastering
might,

Hardly, but happier for the imperious toil,
Swam the knight in forth of the close waves' coil,
Sea-satiate, bruised with buffets of the brine
Laughing, and flushed as one afire with wine:
All this came hard upon him in a breath;
And how he marvelled in his heart that death
Should be no bitterer than it seemed to be
There, in the strenuous impulse of the sea
Borne as to battle deathward: and at last
How all his after seasons overpast
Had brought him darkling to this dark sweet hour,
Where his foot faltered nigh the bridal bower.
And harder seemed the passage now to pass,
Though smoother-seeming than the still sea's glass,
More fit for very manhood's heart to fear,
Than all straits past of peril. Hardly here
Might aught of all things hearten him save one,
Faith: and as men's eyes quail before the sun
So quailed his heart before the star whose light
Put out the torches of his bridal night,
So quailed and shrank with sense of faith's keen
star

That burned as fire beheld by night afar
Deep in the darkness of his dreams; for all
The bride-house now seemed hung with heavier pall
Than clothes the house of mourning. Yet at last,
Soul-sick with trembling at the heart, he passed
Into the sweet light of the maiden bower
Where lay the lonely lily-featured flower

THE MAIDEN MARRIAGE

That, lying within his hand to gather, yet
Might not be gathered of it. Fierce regret
And bitter loyalty strove hard at strife
With amorous pity toward the tender wife
That wife indeed might never be, to wear
The very crown of wedlock; never bear
Children, to watch and worship her white hair
When time should change, with hand more soft than
snow,

The fashion of its glory; never know
The loveliness of laughing love that lives
On little lips of children: all that gives
Glory and grace and reverence and delight
To wedded woman by her bridal right,
All praise and pride that flowers too fair to fall,
Love that should give had stripped her of them
all

And left her bare for ever. So his thought
Consumed him, as a fire within that wrought
Visibly, ravening till its wrath were spent:
So pale he stood, so bowed and passion-rent,
Before the blithe-faced bride-folk, ere he went
Within the chamber, heavy-eyed: and there
Gleamed the white hands and glowed the glimmer-
ing hair

That might but move his memory more of one more
fair,

More fair than all this beauty: but in sooth
So fair she too shone in her flower of youth
That scarcely might man's heart hold fast its truth,
Though strong, who gazed upon her: for her eyes
Were emerald-soft as evening-coloured skies,

THE MAIDEN MARRIAGE

And a smile in them like the light therein
Slept, or shone out in joy that knew not sin,
Clear as a child's own laughter: and her mouth,
Albeit no rose full-hearted from the south
And passion-coloured for the perfect kiss
That signs the soul for love and stamps it his,
Was soft and bright as any bud new-blown;
And through her cheek the gentler lifebloom shone
Of mild wild roses nigh the northward sea.
So in her bride-bed lay the bride: and he
Drew nigh, and all the high sad heart in him
Yearned on her, seeing the twilight meek and dim
Through all the soft alcove tremblingly lit
With hovering silver, as a heart in it
Beating, that burned from one deep lamp above,
Fainter than fire of torches, as the love
Within him fainter than a bridegroom's fire,
No marriage-torch red with the heart's desire,
But silver-soft, a flameless light that glowed
Starlike along night's dark and starry road
Wherein his soul was traveller. And he sighed,
Seeing, and with eyes set sadly toward his bride
Laid him down by her, and spake not: but within
His heart spake, saying how sore should be the
sin

To break toward her, that of all womankind
Was faithfullest, faith plighted, or unbind
The bond first linked between them when they drank
The love-draught: and his quick blood sprang and
sank,

Remembering in the pulse of all his veins
That red swift rapture, all its fiery pains

THE MAIDEN MARRIAGE

And all its fierier pleasures: and he spake
Aloud, one burning word for love's keen sake—
"Iseult;" and full of love and lovelier fear
A virgin voice gave answer—"I am here."
And a pang rent his heart at root: but still,
For spirit and flesh were vassals to his will,
Strong faith held mastery on them: and the breath
Felt on his face did not his will to death,
Nor glance nor lute-like voice nor flower-soft touch
Might so prevail upon it overmuch
That constancy might less prevail than they,
For all he looked and loved her as she lay
Smiling; and soft as bird alights on bough
He kissed her maiden mouth and blameless brow,
Once, and again his heart within him sighed:
But all his young blood's yearning toward his bride,
How hard soe'er it held his life awake
For passion, and sweet nature's unforbidden sake,
And will that strove unwillingly with will it might
 not break,
Fell silent as a wind abashed, whose breath
Dies out of heaven, suddenly done to death,
When in between them on the dumb dusk air
Floated the bright shade of a face more fair
Than hers that hard beside him shrank and smiled
And wist of all no more than might a child.
So had she all her heart's will, all she would,
For love's sake that sufficed her, glad and good,
All night safe sleeping in her maidenhood.

ISEULT AT TINTAGEL

But that same night in Cornwall oversea
 Couched at Queen Iseult's hand, against her knee,
 With keen kind eyes that read her whole heart's pain
 Fast at wide watch lay Tristram's hound Hodain,
 The goodliest and the mightiest born on earth,
 That many a forest day of fiery mirth
 Had plied his craft before them; and the queen
 Cherished him, even for those dim years between,
 More than of old in those bright months far flown
 When ere a blast of Tristram's horn was blown
 Each morning as the woods rekindled, ere
 Day gat full empire of the glimmering air,
 Delight of dawn would quicken him, and fire
 Spring and pant in his breath with bright desire
 To be among the dewy ways on quest:
 But now perforce at restless-hearted rest
 He chafed through days more barren than the sand,
 Soothed hardly but soothed only with her hand,
 Though fain to fawn thereon and follow, still
 With all his heart and all his loving will
 Desiring one divided from his sight,
 For whose lost sake dawn was as dawn of night
 And noon as night's noon in his eyes was dark.
 But in the halls far under sat King Mark,

ISEULT AT TINTAGEL

Feasting, and full of cheer, with heart uplift,
As on the night that harper gat his gift:
And music revelled on the fitful air,
And songs came floated up the festal stair,
And muffled roar of wassail, where the king
Took heart from wine-cups and the quiring string
Till all his cold thin veins rejoiced and ran
Strong as with lifeblood of a kinglier man.
But the queen shut from sound her wearied ears,
Shut her sad eyes from sense of aught save tears,
And wrung her hair with soft fierce hands, and
prayed:

“O God, God born of woman, of a maid,
Christ, once in flesh of thine own fashion clad;
O very love, so glad in heaven and sad
On earth for earth's sake alway; since thou art
Pure only, I only impure of spirit and heart,
Since thou for sin's sake and the bitter doom
Didst as a veil put on a virgin's womb,
I that am none, and cannot hear or see
Or shadow or likeness or a sound of thee
Far off, albeit with man's own speech and face
Thou shine yet and thou speak yet, showing forth
grace—

Ah me! grace only shed on souls that are
Lit and led forth of shadow by thy star—
Alas! to these men only grace, to these,
Lord, whom thy love draws Godward, to thy knees—
I, can I draw thee me-ward, can I seek,
Who love thee not, to love me? seeing how weak,
Lord, all this little love I bear thee is,
And how much is my strong love more than this,

ISEULT AT TINTAGEL

My love that I love man with, that I bear
Him sinning through me sinning? wilt thou care,
God, for this love, if love be any, alas,
In me to give thee, though long since there was,
How long, when I too, Lord, was clean, even I,
That now am unclean till the day I die—
Haply by burning, harlot-fashion, made
A horror in all hearts of wife and maid,
Hateful, not knowing if ever in these mine eyes
Shone any light of thine in any wise
Or this were love at all that I bore thee?"

And the night spake, and thundered on the sea,
Ravening aloud for ruin of lives: and all
The bastions of the main cliff's northward wall
Rang response out from all their deepening length,
As the east wind girded up his godlike strength
And hurled in hard against that high-towered hold
The fleeces of the flock that knows no fold,
The rent white shreds of shattering storm: but she
Heard not nor heeded wind or storming sea,
Knew not if night were mild or mad with wind.

"Yea, though deep lips and tender hair be thinned,
Though cheek wither, brow fade, and bosom wane,
Shall I change also from this heart again
To maidenhood of heart and holiness?
Shall I more love thee, Lord, or love him less—
Ah miserable! though spirit and heart be rent,
Shall I repent, Lord God? shall I repent?
Nay, though thou slay me! for herein I am blest,
That as I loved him yet I love him best—
More than mine own soul or thy love or thee,
Though thy love save and my love save not me.

ISEULT AT TINTAGEL

Blest am I beyond women even herein,
That beyond all born women is my sin,
And perfect my transgression: that above
All offerings of all others is my love,
Who have chosen it only, and put away for this
Thee, and my soul's hope, Saviour, of the kiss
Wherewith thy lips make welcome all thine own
When in them life and death are overthrown;
The sinless lips that seal the death of sin,
The kiss wherewith their dumb lips touched begin
Singing in heaven.

“Where we shall never, love,
Never stand up nor sing! for God above
Knows us, how too much more than God to me
Thy sweet love is, my poor love is to thee!
Dear, dost thou see now, dost thou hear to-night,
Sleeping, my waste wild speech, my face worn white,
—Speech once heard soft by thee, face once kissed
red!—

In such a dream as when men see their dead
And know not if they know if dead these be?
Ah love, are thy days my days, and to thee
Are all nights like as my nights? does the sun
Grieve thee? art thou soul-sick till day be done,
And weary till day rises? is thine heart
Full of dead things as mine is? Nay, thou art
Man, with man's strength and praise and pride of life,
No bondwoman, no queen, no loveless wife
That would be shamed albeit she had not sinned.”

And swordlike was the sound of the iron wind,
And as a breaking battle was the sea.

“Nay, Lord, I pray thee let him love not me,

ISEULT AT TINTAGEL

Love me not any more, nor like me die,
And be no more than such a thing as I.
Turn his heart from me, lest my love too lose
Thee as I lose thee, and his fair soul refuse
For my sake thy fair heaven, and as I fell
Fall, and be mixed with my soul and with hell.
Let me die rather, and only; let me be
Hated of him so he be loved of thee,
Lord: for I would not have him with me there
Out of thy light and love in the unlit air,
Out of thy sight in the unseen hell where I
Go gladly, going alone, so thou on high
Lift up his soul and love him—Ah, Lord, Lord,
Shalt thou love as I love him? she that poured
From the alabaster broken at thy feet
An ointment very precious, not so sweet
As that poured likewise forth before thee then
From the rehalloved heart of Magdalen,
From a heart broken, yearning like the dove,
An ointment very precious which is love—
Couldst thou being holy and God, and sinful she,
Love her indeed as surely she loved thee?
Nay, but if not, then as we sinners can
Let us love still in the old sad wise of man.
For with less love than my love, having had
Mine, though God love him he shall not be glad.
And with such love as my love, I wot well,
He shall not lie disconsolate in hell:
Sad only as souls for utter love's sake be
Here, and a little sad, perchance, for me—
Me happy, me more glad than God above,
In the utmost hell whose fires consume not love!

ISEULT AT TINTAGEL

For in the waste ways emptied of the sun
He would say—'Dear, thy place is void, and
one

Weeps among angels for thee, with his face
Veiled, saying, *O sister, how thy chosen place
Stands desolate, that God made fair for thee!*

*Is heaven not sweeter, and we thy brethren, we
Fairer than love on earth and life in hell?*

And I—with me were all things then not well?
Should I not answer—'O love, be well content;
Look on me, and behold if I repent.'

This were more to me than an angel's wings.

Yea, many men pray God for many things,
But I pray that this only thing may be."

And as a full field charging was the sea,

And as the cry of slain men was the wind.

"Yea, since I surely loved him, and he sinned

Surely, though not as my sin his be black,

God, give him to me—God, God, give him back!

For now how should we live in twain or die?

I am he indeed, thou knowest, and he is I.

Not man and woman several as we were,

But one thing with one life and death to bear.

How should one love his own soul overmuch?

And time is long since last I felt the touch,

The sweet touch of my lover, hand and breath,

In such delight as puts delight to death,

Burn my soul through, till spirit and soul and sense,

In the sharp grasp of the hour, with violence

Died, and again through pangs of violent birth

Lived, and laughed out with refluent might of
mirth;

ISEULT AT TINTAGEL

Laughed each on other and shuddered into one,
As a cloud shuddering dies into the sun.
Ah, sense is that or spirit, soul or flesh,
That only love lulls or awakes afresh?
Ah, sweet is that or bitter, evil or good,
That very love allays not as he would?
Nay, truth is this or vanity, that gives
No love assurance when love dies or lives?
This that my spirit is wrung withal, and yet
No surelier knows if haply thine forget,
Thou that my spirit is wrung for, nor can say
Love is not in thee dead as yesterday?
Dost thou feel, thou, this heartbeat whence my heart
Would send thee word what life is mine apart,
And know by keen response what life is thine?
Dost thou not hear one cry of all of mine?
O Tristram's heart, have I no part in thee?"

And all her soul was as the breaking sea,
And all her heart anhungered as the wind.

"Dost thou repent thee of the sin we sinned?
Dost thou repent thee of the days and nights
That kindled and that quenched for us their lights,
The months that feasted us with all their hours,
The ways that breathed of us in all their flowers,
The dells that sang of us with all their doves?
Dost thou repent thee of the wildwood loves?
Is thine heart changed, and hallowed? art thou
grown

God's, and not mine? Yet, though my heart make
moan,

Fain would my soul give thanks for thine, if thou
Be saved—yea, fain praise God, and knows not how.

ISEULT AT TINTAGEL

How should it know thanksgiving? nay, or learn
Aught of the love wherewith thine own should burn,
God's, that should cast out as an evil thing
Mine? yea, what hand of prayer have I to cling,
What heart to prophesy, what spirit of sight
To strain insensual eyes toward increate light,
Who look but back on life wherein I sinned?"

And all their past came wailing in the wind,
And all their future thundered in the sea.

"But if my soul might touch the time to be,
If hand might handle now or eye behold
My life and death ordained me from of old,
Life palpable, compact of blood and breath,
Visible, present, naked, very death,
Should I desire to know before the day
These that I know not, nor is man that may?
For haply, seeing, my heart would break for fear,
And my soul timeless cast its load off here,
Its load of life too bitter, love too sweet,
And fall down shamed and naked at thy feet,
God, who wouldst take no pity of it, nor give
One hour back, one of all its hours to live
Clothed with my mortal body, that once more,
Once, on this reach of barren beaten shore,
This stormy strand of life, ere sail were set,
Had haply felt love's arms about it yet—
Yea, ere death's bark put off to seaward, might
With many a grief have bought me one delight
That then should know me never. Ah, what years
Would I endure not, filled up full with tears,
Bitter like blood and dark as dread of death,
To win one amorous hour of mingling breath,

ISEULT AT TINTAGEL

One fire-eyed hour and sunnier than the sun,
For all these nights and days like nights but one?
One hour of heaven born once, a stormless birth,
For all these windy weary hours of earth?
One, but one hour from birth of joy to death,
For all these hungering hours of feverish breath?
And I should lose this, having died and sinned."

And as man's anguish clamouring cried the wind,
And as God's anger answering rang the sea.

"And yet what life—Lord God, what life for me
Has thy strong wrath made ready? Dost thou
think

How lips whose thirst hath only tears to drink
Grow grey for grief untimely? Dost thou know,
O happy God, how men wax weary of woe—
Yea, for their wrong's sake that thine hand hath
done

Come even to hate thy semblance in the sun?
Turn back from dawn and noon and all thy light
To make their souls one with the soul of night?
Christ, if thou hear yet or have eyes to see,
Thou that hadst pity, and hast no pity on me,
Know'st thou no more, as in this life's sharp span,
What pain thou hadst on earth, what pain hath
man?

Hast thou no care, that all we suffer yet?
What help is ours of thee if thou forget?
What profit have we though thy blood were given,
If we that sin bleed and be not forgiven?
Not love but hate, thou bitter God and strange,
Whose heart as man's heart hath grown cold with
change,

ISEULT AT TINTAGEL

Not love but hate thou showest us that have
sinned."

And like a world's cry shuddering was the wind,
And like a God's voice threatening was the sea.

"Nay, Lord, for thou wast gracious; nay, in thee
No change can come with time or varying fate,
No tongue bid thine be less compassionate,
No sterner eye rebuke for mercy thine,
No sin put out thy pity—no, not mine.

Thou knowest us, Lord, thou knowest us, all we
are,

He, and the soul that hath his soul for star:
Thou knowest as I know, Lord, how much more
worth

Than all souls clad and clasped about with earth,
But most of all, God, how much more than I,
Is this man's soul that surely shall not die.
What righteousness, what judgment, Lord most
high,

Were this, to bend a brow of doom as grim
As threats me, me the adulterous wife, on him?
There lies none other nightly by his side:
He hath not sought, he shall not seek a bride.
Far as God sunders earth from heaven above,
So far was my love born beneath his love.
I loved him as the sea-wind loves the sea,
To rend and ruin it only and waste: but he,
As the sea love a sea-bird loved he me,
To foster and uphold my tired life's wing,
And bounteously beneath me spread forth spring,
A springtide space whereon to float or fly,
A world of happy water, whence the sky

ISEULT AT TINTAGEL

Glowed goodlier, lightening from so glad a glass,
Than with its own light only. Now, alas!
Cloud hath come down and clothed it round with
storm,

And gusts and fits of eddying winds deform
The feature of its glory. Yet be thou,
God, merciful: nay, show but justice now,
And let the sin in him that scarce was his
Stand expiated with exile: and be this
The price for him, the atonement this, that I
With all the sin upon me live, and die
With all thy wrath on me that most have sinned."

And like man's heart relenting sighed the wind,
And as God's wrath subsiding sank the sea.

"But if such grace be possible—if it be
Not sin more strange than all sins past, and worse
Evil, that cries upon thee for a curse,
To pray such prayers from such a heart, do thou
Hear, and make wide thine hearing toward me now;
Let not my soul and his for ever dwell
Sundered: though doom keep always heaven and hell
Irreconcilable, infinitely apart,
Keep not in twain for ever heart and heart
That once, albeit by not thy law, were one;
Let this be not thy will, that this be done.
Let all else, all thou wilt of evil, be,
But no doom, none, dividing him and me."

By this was heaven stirred eastward, and there
came
Up the rough ripple a labouring light like flame;
And dawn, sore trembling still and grey with fear,
Looked hardly forth, a face of heavier cheer

ISEULT AT TINTAGEL

Than one which grief or dread yet half enshrouds,
Wild-eyed and wan, across the cleaving clouds.
And Iseult, worn with watch long held on pain,
Turned, and her eye lit on the hound Hodain,
And all her heart went out in tears: and he
Laid his kind head along her bended knee,
Till round his neck her arms went hard, and all
The night past from her as a chain might fall:
But yet the heart within her, half undone,
Wailed, and was loth to let her see the sun.

And ere full day brought heaven and earth to
flower,
Far thence, a maiden in a marriage bower,
That moment, hard by Tristram, oversea,
Woke with glad eyes Iseult of Brittany.

JOYOUS GARD

A LITTLE time, O Love, a little light,
A little hour for ease before the night.
Sweet Love, that art so bitter; foolish Love,
Whom wise men know for wiser, and thy dove
More subtle than the serpent; for thy sake
These pray thee for a little beam to break,
A little grace to help them, lest men think
Thy servants have but hours like tears to drink.
O Love, a little comfort, lest they fear
To serve as these have served thee who stand here.

For these are thine, thy servants these, that stand
Here nigh the limit of the wild north land,
At margin of the grey great eastern sea,
Dense-islanded with peaks and reefs, that see
No life but of the fleet wings fair and free
Which cleave the mist and sunlight all day long
With sleepless flight and cries more glad than song.
Strange ways of life have led them hither, here
To win fleet respite from desire and fear
With armistice from sorrow; strange and sweet
Ways trodden by forlorn and casual feet
Till kindlier chance woke toward them kindly will
In happier hearts of lovers, and their ill

JOYOUS GARD

Found rest, as healing surely might it not,
By gift and kingly grace of Launcelot
At gracious bidding given of Guenevere.
For in the trembling twilight of this year
Ere April sprang from hope to certitude
Two hearts of friends fast linked had fallen at
feud

As they rode forth on hawking, by the sign
Which gave his new bride's brother Ganhardine
To know the truth of Tristram's dealing, how
Faith kept of him against his marriage vow
Kept virginal his bride-bed night and morn;
Whereat, as wroth his blood should suffer scorn,
Came Ganhardine to Tristram, saying, "Behold,
We have loved thee, and for love we have shown of
old

Scorn hast thou shown us: wherefore is thy bride
Not thine indeed, a stranger at thy side,
Contemned? what evil hath she done, to be
Mocked with mouth-marriage and despised of thee,
Shamed, set at nought, rejected?" But there came
On Tristram's brow and eye the shadow and flame
Confused of wrath and wonder, ere he spake,
Saying, "Hath she bid thee for thy sister's sake
Plead with me, who believed of her in heart
More nobly than to deem such piteous part
Should find so fair a player? or whence hast thou
Of us this knowledge?" "Nay," said he, "but
now,

Riding beneath these whitethorns overhead,
There fell a flower into her girdlestead
Which laughing she shook out, and smiling said—

JOYOUS GARD

'Lo, what large leave the wind hath given this stray,
To lie more near my heart than till this day
Aught ever since my mother lulled me lay
Or even my lord came ever;' whence I wot
We are all thy scorn, a race regarded not
Nor held as worth communion of thine own,
Except in her be found some fault alone
To blemish our alliance." Then replied
Tristram, "Nor blame nor scorn may touch my bride,
Albeit unknown of love she live, and be
Worth a man worthier than her love thought me.
Faith only, faith withheld me, faith forbade
The blameless grace wherewith love's grace makes
glad

All lives linked else in wedlock; not that less
I loved the sweet light of her loveliness,
But that my love toward faith was more: and thou,
Albeit thine heart be keen against me now,
Couldst thou behold my very lady, then
No more of thee than of all other men
Should this my faith be held a faithless fault."
And ere that day their hawking came to halt,
Being sore of him entreated for a sign,
He sware to bring his brother Ganhardine
To sight of that strange Iseult: and thereon
Forth soon for Cornwall are these brethren gone,
Even to that royal pleasance where the hunt
Rang ever of old with Tristram's horn in front
Blithe as the queen's horse bounded at his side:
And first of all her dames forth pranced in pride
That day before them, with a ringing rein
All golden-glad, the king's false bride Brangwain,

JOYOUS GARD

The queen's true handmaid ever: and on her
Glancing, "Be called for all time truth-teller,
O Tristram, of all true men's tongues alive,"
Quoth Ganhardine; "for may my soul so thrive
As yet mine eye drank never sight like this."
"Ay?" Tristram said, "and she thou look'st on is
So great in grace of goodliness, that thou
Hast less thought left of wrath against me now,
Seeing but my lady's handmaid? Nay, behold;
See'st thou no light more golden than of gold
Shine where she moves in midst of all, above
All, past all price or praise or prayer of love?
Lo, this is she." But as one mazed with wine
Stood, stunned in spirit and stricken, Ganhardine,
And gazed out hard against them: and his heart
As with a sword was cloven, and rent apart
As with strong fangs of fire; and scarce he spake,
Saying how his life for even a handmaid's sake
Was made a flame within him. And the knight
Bade him, being known of none that stood in sight,
Bear to Brangwain his ring, that she unseen
Might give in token privily to the queen
And send swift word where under moon or sun
They twain might yet be no more twain but one.
And that same night, under the stars that rolled
Over their warm deep wildwood nights of old
Whose hours for grains of sand shed sparks of fire,
Such way was made anew for their desire
By secret wile of sickness feigned, to keep
The king far off her vigils or her sleep,
That in the queen's pavilion midway set
By glimmering moondawn were those lovers met,

JOYOUS GARD

And Ganhardine of Brangwain gat him grace.
And in some passionate soft interspace
Between two swells of passion, when their lips
Breathed, and made room for such brief speech as
slips

From tongues athirst with draughts of amorous wine
That leaves them thirstier than the salt sea's brine,
Was counsel taken how to fly, and where
Find covert from the wild world's ravening air
That hunts with storm the feet of nights and days
Through strange thwart lines of life and flowerless
ways.

Then said Iseult: "Lo, now the chance is here
Foreshown me late by word of Guenevere,
To give me comfort of thy rumoured wrong,
My traitor Tristram, when report was strong
Of me forsaken and thine heart estranged:
Nor should her sweet soul toward me yet be changed
Nor all her love lie barren, if mine hand
Crave harvest of it from the flowering land.
See therefore if this counsel please thee not,
That we take horse in haste for Camelot
And seek that friendship of her plighted troth
Which love shall be full fain to lend, nor loth
Shall my love be to take it." So next night
The multitudinous stars laughed round their flight,
Fulfilling far with laughter made of light
The encircling deeps of heaven: and in brief space
At Camelot their long love gat them grace
Of those fair twain whose heads men's praise im-
pearled

As love's two lordliest lovers in the world:

JOYOUS GARD

And thence as guests for harbourage past they
forth

To win this noblest hold of all the north.

Far by wild ways and many days they rode,

Till clear across June's kingliest sunset glowed

The great round girth of goodly wall that showed

Where for one clear sweet season's length should be

Their place of strength to rest in, fain and free,

By the utmost margin of the loud lone sea.

And now, O Love, what comfort? God most
high,

Whose life is as a flower's to live and die,

Whose light is everlasting: Lord, whose breath

Speaks music through the deathless lips of death

Whereto time's heart rings answer: Bard, whom
time

Hears, and is vanquished with a wandering rhyme

That once thy lips made fragrant: Seer, whose sooth

Joy knows not well, but sorrow knows for truth,

Being priestess of thy soothsayings: Love, what
grace

Shall these twain find at last before thy face?

This many a year they have served thee, and
deserved,

If ever man might yet of all that served,

Since the first heartbeat bade the first man's knee

Bend, and his mouth take music, praising thee,

Some comfort; and some honey indeed of thine

Thou hast mixed for these with life's most bitter
wine,

Commending to their passionate lips a draught

No deadlier than thy chosen of old have quaffed

JOYOUS GARD

And blessed thine hand, their cupbearer's: for not
On all men comes the grace that seals their lot
As holier in thy sight, for all these feuds
That rend it, than the light-souled multitude's,
Nor thwarted of thine hand nor blessed; but these
Shall see no twilight, Love, nor fade at ease,
Grey-grown and careless of desired delight,
But lie down tired and sleep before the night.
These shall not live till time or change may chill
Or doubt divide or shame subdue their will,
Or fear or slow repentance work them wrong,
Or love die first: these shall not live so long.
Death shall not take them drained of dear true life
Already, sick or stagnant from the strife,
Quenched: not with dry-drawn veins and lingering
 breath
Shall these through crumbling hours crouch down to
 death.
Swift, with one strong clean leap, ere life's pulse tire,
Most like the leap of lions or of fire,
Sheer death shall bound upon them: one pang past,
The first keen sense of him shall be their last,
Their last shall be no sense of any fear,
More than their life had sense of anguish here.

 Weeks and light months had fled at swallow's
 speed
Since here, their first hour sowed for them the seed
Of many sweet as rest or hope could be;
Since on the blown beach of a glad new sea
Wherein strange rocks like fighting men stand
 scarred
They saw the strength and help of Joyous Gard.

JOYOUS GARD

Within the full deep glorious tower that stands
Between the wild sea and the broad wild lands
Love led and gave them quiet: and they drew
Life like a God's life in each wind that blew,
And took their rest, and triumphed. Day by day
The mighty moorlands and the sea-walls grey,
The brown bright waters of green fells that sing
One song to rocks and flowers and birds on wing,
Beheld the joy and glory that they had,
Passing, and how the whole world made them glad,
And their great love was mixed with all things great,
As life being lovely, and yet being strong like fate.
For when the sun sprang on the sudden sea
Their eyes sprang eastward, and the day to be
Was lit in them untimely: such delight
They took yet of the clear cold breath and light
That goes before the morning, and such grace
Was deathless in them through their whole life's
space

As dies in many with their dawn that dies
And leaves in pulseless hearts and flameless eyes
No light to lighten and no tear to weep
For youth's high joy that time has cast on sleep.
Yea, this old grace and height of joy they had,
To lose no jot of all that made them glad
And filled their springs of spirit with such fire
That all delight fed in them all desire;
And no whit less than in their first keen prime
The spring's breath blew through all their summer
time,
And in their skies would sunlike Love confuse
Clear April colours with hot August hues,

JOYOUS GARD

And in their hearts one light of sun and moon
Reigned, and the morning died not of the noon:
Such might of life was in them, and so high
Their heart of love rose higher than fate could fly.
And many a large delight of hawk and hound
The great glad land that knows no bourne or bound,
Save the wind's own and the outer sea-bank's,
gave

Their days for comfort; many a long blithe wave
Buoyed their blithe bark between the bare bald
rocks,

Deep, steep, and still, save for the swift free flocks
Unshepherded, uncompassed, unconfined,
That when blown foam keeps all the loud air blind
Mix with the wind's their triumph, and partake
The joy of blasts that ravin, waves that break,
All round and all below their mustering wings,
A clanging cloud that round the cliff's edge clings
On each bleak bluff breaking the strenuous tides
That rings reverberate mirth when storm bestrides
The subject night in thunder: many a noon
They took the moorland's or the bright sea's boon
With all their hearts into their spirit of sense,
Rejoicing, where the sudden dells grew dense
With sharp thick flight of hillside birds, or where
On some strait rock's ledge in the intense mute air
Erect against the cliff's sheer sunlit white
Blue as the clear north heaven, clothed warm with
light,

Stood neck to bended neck and wing to wing
With heads fast hidden under, close as cling
Flowers on one flowering almond-branch in spring,

JOYOUS GARD

Three herons deep asleep against the sun,
Each with one bright foot downward poised, and
one

Wing-hidden hard by the bright head, and all
Still as fair shapes fixed on some wondrous wall
Of minster-aisle or cloister-close or hall
To take even time's eye prisoner with delight.
Or, satisfied with joy of sound and sight,
They sat and communed of things past: what state
King Arthur, yet unwarred upon by fate,
Held high in hall at Camelot, like one
Whose lordly life was as the mounting sun
That climbs and pauses on the point of noon,
Sovereign: how royal rang the tourney's tune
Through Tristram's three days' triumph, spear to
spear,

When Iseult shone enthroned by Guenevere,
Rose against rose, the highest adored on earth,
Imperial: yet with subtle notes of mirth
Would she bemoan her praises, and bemoan
Her glory by that splendour overthrown
Which lightened from her sister's eyes elate;
Saying how by night a little light seems great,
But less than least of all things, very nought,
When dawn undoes the web that darkness wrought;
How like a tower of ivory well designed
By subtlest hand subserving subtlest mind,
Ivory with flower of rose incarnadined
And kindling with some God therein revealed,
A light for grief to look on and be healed,
Stood Guenevere: and all beholding her
Were heartstruck even as earth at midsummer

JOYOUS GARD

With burning wonder, hardly to be borne.
So was that amorous glorious lady born,
A fiery memory for all storied years:
Nor might men call her sisters crowned her peers,
Her sister queens, put all by her to scorn:
She had such eyes as are not made to mourn;
But in her own a gleaming ghost of tears
Shone, and their glance was slower than Guenevere's,
And fitfuller with fancies grown of grief;
Shamed as a Mayflower shames an autumn leaf
Full well she wist it could not choose but be
If in that other's eyeshot standing she
Should lift her looks up ever: wherewithal
Like fires whose light fills heaven with festival
Flamed her eyes full on Tristram's; and he laughed
Answering, "What wile of sweet child-hearted craft
That children forge for children, to beguile
Eyes known of them not witless of the wile
But fain to seem for sport's sake self-deceived,
Wilt thou find out now not to be believed?
Or how shall I trust more than ouphe or elf
Thy truth to me-ward, who beliest thyself?"
"Nor elf nor ouphe or aught of airier kind,"
Quoth she, "though made of moonbeams moist and
blind,
Is light if weighed with man's winged weightless
mind.
Though thou keep somewise troth with me, God
wot,
When thou didst wed, I doubt, thou thoughtest not
So charily to keep it." "Nay," said he,
"Yet am not I rebukable by thee

JOYOUS GARD

As Launcelot, erring, held me ere he wist
No mouth save thine of mine was ever kissed
Save as a sister's only, since we twain
Drank first the draught assigned our lips to drain
That Fate and Love with darkling hands commixt
Poured, and no power to part them came betwixt,
But either's will, howbeit they seem at strife,
Was toward us one, as death itself and life
Are one sole doom toward all men, nor may one
Behold not darkness, who beholds the sun."

"Ah, then," she said, "what word is this men hear
Of Merlin, how some doom too strange to fear
Was cast but late about him oversea,
Sweet recreant, in thy bridal Brittany?
Is not his life sealed fast on him with sleep,
By witchcraft of his own and love's, to keep
Till earth be fire and ashes?"

"Surely," said

Her lover, "not as one alive or dead
The great good wizard, well beloved and well
Predestinate of heaven that casts out hell
For guerdon gentler far than all men's fate,
Exempt alone of all predestinate,
Takes his strange rest at heart of slumberland.
More deep asleep in green Broceliande
Than shipwrecked sleepers in the soft green sea
Beneath the weight of wandering waves: but he
Hath for those roofing waters overhead
Above him always all the summer spread
Or all the winter wailing: or the sweet
Late leaves marked red with autumn's burning
feet,

JOYOUS GARD

Or withered with his weeping, round the seer
Rain, and he sees not, nor may heed or hear
The witness of the winter: but in spring
He hears above him all the winds on wing
Through the blue dawn between the brightening
 boughs,

And on shut eyes and slumber-smitten brows
Feels ambient change in the air and strengthening
 sun,

And knows the soul that was his soul at one
With the ardent world's, and in the spirit of earth
His spirit of life reborn to mightier birth
And mixed with things of elder life than ours;
With cries of birds, and kindling lamps of flow-
 ers,

And sweep and song of winds, and fruitful light
Of sunbeams, and the far faint breath of night,
And waves and woods at morning: and in all,
Soft as at noon the slow sea's rise and fall,
He hears in spirit a song that none but he
Hears from the mystic mouth of Nimue
Shed like a consecration; and his heart,
Hearing, is made for love's sake as a part
Of that far singing, and the life thereof
Part of that life that feeds the world with love:
Yea, heart in heart is molten, hers and his,
Into the world's heart and the soul that is
Beyond or sense or vision; and their breath
Stirs the soft springs of deathless life and death,
Death that bears life, and change that brings forth
 seed

Of life to death and death to life indeed,

JOYOUS GARD

As blood recircling through the unsounded veins
Of earth and heaven with all their joys and pains.
Ah, that when love shall laugh no more nor weep
We too, we too might hear that song and sleep!"

"Yea," said Iseult, "some joy it were to be
Lost in the sun's light and the all-girdling sea,
Mixed with the winds and woodlands, and to bear
Part in the large life of the quickening air,
And the sweet earth's, our mother: yet to pass
More fleet than mirrored faces from the glass
Out of all pain and all delight, so far
That love should seem but as the furthest star
Sunk deep in trembling heaven, scarce seen or
known,

As a dead moon forgotten, once that shone
Where now the sun shines—nay, not all things yet,
Not all things always, dying, would I forget."

And Tristram answered amorously, and said:
"O heart that here art mine, O heavenliest head
That ever took men's worship here, which art
Mine, how shall death put out the fire at heart,
Quench in men's eyes the head's remembered light,
That time shall set but higher in more men's sight?
Think thou not much to die one earthly day,
Being made not in their mould who pass away
Nor who shall pass for ever."

"Ah," she said,
"What shall it profit me, being praised and dead?
What profit have the flowers of all men's praise?
What pleasure of our pleasure have the days
That pour on us delight of life and mirth?
What fruit of all our joy on earth has earth?"

JOYOUS GARD

Nor am I—nay, my lover, am I one
To take such part in heaven's enkindling sun
And in the inviolate air and sacred sea
As clothes with grace that wondrous Nimue?
For all her works are bounties, all her deeds
Blessings; her days are scrolls wherein love reads
The record of his mercies; heaven above
Hath not more heavenly holiness of love
Than earth beneath, wherever pass or pause
Her feet that move not save by love's own laws,
In gentleness of godlike wayfaring
To heal men's hearts as earth is healed by spring
Of all such woes as winter: what am I,
Love, that have strength but to desire and die,
That have but grace to love and do thee wrong,
What am I that my name should live so long,
Save as the star that crossed thy star-struck lot,
With hers whose light was life to Launcelot?
Life gave she him, and strength, and fame to be
For ever: I, what gift can I give thee?
Peril and sleepless watches, fearful breath
Of dread more bitter for my sake than death
When death came nigh to call me by my name,
Exile, rebuke, remorse, and—O, not shame.
Shame only, this I gave thee not, whom none
May give that worst thing ever—no, not one.
Of all that hate, all hateful hearts that see
Darkness for light and hate where love should be,
None for my shame's sake may speak shame of
thee."

And Tristram answering ere he kissed her smiled:
"O very woman, god at once and child,

JOYOUS GARD

What ails thee to desire of me once more
The assurance that thou hadst in heart before?
For all this wild sweet waste of sweet vain breath,
Thou knowest I know thou hast given me life, not
death.

The shadow of death, informed with shows of
strife,

Was ere I won thee all I had of life.

Light war, light love, light living, dreams in sleep,
Joy slight and light, not glad enough to weep,
Filled up my foolish days with sound and shine,
Vision and gleam from strange men's cast on
mine,

Reverberate light from eyes presaging thine
That shed but shadowy moonlight where thy face
Now sheds forth sunshine in the deep same place,
The deep live heart half dead and shallower then
Than summer fords which thwart not wandering
men.

For how should I, signed sorrow's from my birth,
Kiss dumb the loud red laughing lips of mirth?
Or how, sealed thine to be, love less than heaven on
earth?

My heart in me was held at restless rest,
Presageful of some prize beyond its quest,
Prophetic still with promise, fain to find the best.
For one was fond and one was blithe and one
Fairer than all save twain whose peers are none;
For third on earth is none that heaven hath seen
To stand with Guenevere beside my queen.
Not Nimue, girt with blessing as a guard:
Not the soft lures and laughters of Ettarde:

JOYOUS GARD

Not she, that splendour girdled round with gloom,
Crowned as with iron darkness of the tomb,
And clothed with clouding conscience of a monstrous doom,

Whose blind incestuous love brought forth a fire
To burn her ere it burn its darkling sire,
Her mother's son, King Arthur: yet but late
We saw pass by that fair live shadow of fate,
The queen Morgause of Orkney, like a dream
That scares the night when moon and starry beam
Sicken and swoon before some sorcerer's eyes
Whose wordless charms defile the saintly skies,
Bright still with fire and pulse of blood and breath,
Whom her own sons have doomed for shame to death."

"Death—yea," quoth she, "there is not said or heard

So oft aloud on earth so sure a word.
Death, and again death, and for each that saith
Ten tongues chime answer to the sound of death.
Good end God send us ever—so men pray.
But I—this end God send me, would I say,
To die not of division and a heart
Rent or with sword of severance cloven apart,
But only when thou diest and only where thou art,
O thou my soul and spirit and breath to me,
O light, life, love! yea, let this only be,
That dying I may praise God who gave me thee,
Let hap what will thereafter."

So that day

They communed, even till even was worn away,
Nor aught they said seemed strange or sad to say,

JOYOUS GARD

But sweet as night's dim dawn to weariness.
Nor loved they life or love for death's sake less,
Nor feared they death for love's or life's sake more
And on the sounding soft funereal shore
They, watching till the day should wholly die,
Saw the far sea sweep to the far grey sky, ~
Saw the long sands sweep to the long grey sea.
And night made one sweet mist of moor and lea,
And only far off shore the foam gave light.
And life in them sank silent as the night.

THE WIFE'S VIGIL

BUT all that year in Brittany forlorn,
More sick at heart with wrath than fear of scorn
And less in love with love than grief, and less
With grief than pride of spirit and bitterness,
Till all the sweet life of her blood was changed
And all her soul from all her past estranged
And all her will with all itself at strife
And all her mind at war with all her life,
Dwelt the white-handed Iseult, maid and wife,
A mourner that for mourning robes had on
Anger and doubt and hate of things foregone.
For that sweet spirit of old which made her sweet
Was parched with blasts of thought as flowers with
heat

And withered as with wind of evil will;
Though slower than frosts or fires consume or kill
That bleak black wind vexed all her spirit still.
As ripples reddening in the roughening breath
Of the eager east when dawn does night to death,
So rose and stirred and kindled in her thought
Fierce barren fluctuant fires that lit not aught,
But scorched her soul with yearning keen as hate
And dreams that left her wrath disconsolate.

THE WIFE'S VIGIL

When change came first on that first heaven where
all

Life's hours were flowers that dawn's light hand let
fall,

The sun that smote her dewy cloud of days
Wrought from its showery folds his rainbow's rays,
For love the red, for hope the gentle green,
But yellow jealousy glared pale between.
Ere yet the sky grew heavier, and her head
Bent flowerwise, chill with change and fancies fled,
She saw but love arch all her heaven across with
red,

A burning bloom that seemed to breathe and beat
And waver only as flame with rapturous heat
Wavers; and all the world therewith smelt sweet,
As incense kindling from the rose-red flame:
And when that full flush waned, and love became
Scarce fainter, though his fading horoscope
From certitude of sight receded, hope
Held yet her April-coloured light aloft
As though to lure back love, a lamp sublime and soft.
But soon that light paled as a leaf grows pale
And fluttered leaf-like in the gathering gale
And melted even as dew-flakes, whose brief sheen
The sun that gave despoils of glittering green;
Till harder shone 'twixt hope and love grown cold
A sallow light like withering autumn's gold,
The pale strong flame of jealous thought, that glows
More deep than hope's green bloom or love's en-
kindled rose:

As though the sunflower's faint fierce disk absorbed
The spirit and heart of starrier flowers disorbed.

THE WIFE'S VIGIL

That same full hour of twilight's doors unbarred
To let bright night behold in Joyous Gard
The glad grave eyes of lovers far away
Watch with sweet thoughts of death the death of
day

Saw lonelier by the narrower opening sea
Sit fixed at watch Iseult of Brittany.
As darkness from deep valleys void and bleak
Climbs till it clothe with night the sunniest peak
Where only of all a mystic mountain-land
Day seems to cling yet with a trembling hand
And yielding heart reluctant to recede,
So, till her soul was clothed with night indeed,
Rose the slow cloud of envious will within
And hardening hate that held itself no sin,
Veiled heads of vision, eyes of evil gleam,
Dim thought on thought, and darkling dream on
dream.

Far off she saw in spirit, and seeing abhorred,
The likeness wrought on darkness of her lord
Shine, and the imperial semblance at his side
Whose shadow from her seat cast down the bride,
Whose power and ghostly presence thrust her
forth:

Beside that unknown other sea far north
She saw them, clearer than in present sight
Rose on her eyes the starry shadow of night;
And on her heart that heaved with gathering fate
Rose red with storm the starless shadow of hate;
And eyes and heart made one saw surge and
swell

The fires of sunset like the fires of hell.

THE WIFE'S VIGIL

As though God's wrath would burn up sin with
shame,

The incensed red gold of deepening heaven grew
flame:

The sweet green spaces of the soft low sky

Faded, as fields that withering wind leaves dry:

The sea's was like a doomsman's blasting breath
From lips afoam with ravenous lust of death.

A night like desolation, sombre-starred,

Above the great walled girth of Joyous Gard

Spread forth its wide sad strength of shadow and
gloom

Wherein those twain were compassed round with
doom:

Hell from beneath called on them, and she heard

Reverberate judgment in the wild wind's word

Cry, till the sole sound of their names that rang

Clove all the sea-mist with a clarion's clang,

And clouds to clouds and flames to clustering flames

Beat back the dark noise of the direful names.

Fear and strong exultation caught her breath,

And triumph like the bitterness of death,

And rapture like the rage of hate allayed

With ruin and ravin that its might hath made;

And her heart swelled and strained itself to hear

What may be heard of no man's hungering ear,

And as a soil that cleaves in twain for drouth

Thirsted for judgment given of God's own mouth

Against them, till the strength of dark desire

Was in her as a flame of hell's own fire.

Nor seemed the wrath which held her spirit in stress

Aught else or worse than passionate holiness,

THE WIFE'S VIGIL

Nor the ardent hate which called on judgment's rod
More hateful than the righteousness of God.

“How long, till thou do justice, and my wrong
Stand expiate? O long-suffering judge, how long?
Shalt thou not put him in mine hand one day
Whom I so loved, to spare not but to slay?
Shalt thou not cast her down for me to tread,
Me, on the pale pride of her humbled head?
Do I not well, being angry? doth not hell
Require them? yea, thou knowest that I do well.
Is not thy seal there set of bloodred light
For witness on the brows of day and night?
Who shall unseal it? what shall melt away
Thy signet from the doors of night and day?
No man, nor strength of any spirit above,
Nor prayer, nor ardours of adulterous love.
Thou art God, the strong lord over body and soul:
Hast thou not in the terrors of thy scroll
All names of **all** men written as with fire?
Thine only breath bids time and space respire:
And are not all things evil in them done
More clear in thine eyes than in ours the sun?
Hast thou not sight stretched wide enough to see
These that offend it, these at once and me?
Is thine arm shortened or thine hand struck down
As palsied? have thy brows not strength to frown?
Are thine eyes blind with film of withering age?
Burns not thine heart with righteousness of rage
Yet, and the royal rancour toward thy foes
Retributive of ruin? Time should close,
Thou said'st, and earth fade as a leaf grows grey,
Ere one word said of thine should pass away.

THE WIFE'S VIGIL

Was this then not thy word, thou God most high,
That sin shall surely bring forth death and die,
Seeing how these twain live and have joy of life,
His harlot and the man that made me wife?
For is it I, perchance, I that have sinned?
Me, peradventure, should thy wasting wind
Smite, and thy sun blast, and thy storms devour
Me with keen fangs of lightning? should thy power
Put forth on me the weight of its awakening hour?
Shall I that bear this burden bear that weight
Of judgment? is my sin against thee great,
If all my heart against them burn with all its
hate?

Thine, and not mine, should hate be? nay, but me
They have spoiled and scoffed at, who can touch not
thee.

Me, me, the fullness of their joy drains dry,
Their fruitfulness makes barren: thou, not I,
Lord, is it, whom their wrongdoing clothes with
shame,

That all who speak shoot tongues out at thy name
As all who hear mock mine? Make me thy sword
At least, if even thou too be wronged, O Lord,
At all of these that wrong me: make mine hand
As lightning, or my tongue a fiery brand,
To burn or smite them with thy wrath: behold,
I have nought on earth save thee for hope or
hold,

Fail me not thou: I have nought but this to crave,
Make me thy mean to give them to the grave,
Thy sign that all men seeing may speak thee just,
Thy word which turns the strengths of sin to dust,

THE WIFE'S VIGIL

Thy blast which burns up towers and thrones with
fire.

Lord, is this gift, this grace that I require,
So great a gift, Lord, for thy grace to give
And bid me bear thy part retributive?
That I whom scorn makes mouths at, I might be
Thy witness if loud sin may mock at thee?
For lo, my life is as a barren ear
Plucked from the sheaf: dark days drive past me
here

Downtrodden, while joy's reapers pile their sheaves,
A thing more vile than autumn's weariest leaves,
For these the sun filled once with sap of life.
O thou my lord that hadst me to thy wife,
Dost thou not fear at all, remembering me,
The love that bowed my whole soul down to thee?
Is this so wholly nought for man to dread,
Man, whose life walks between the quick and dead,
Naked, and warred about with wind and sea,
That one should love and hate as I do thee?
That one should live in all the world his foe
So mortal as the hate that loves him so?
Nought, is it nought, O husband, O my knight,
O strong man and indomitable in fight,
That one more weak than foam-bells on the sea
Should have in heart such thoughts as I of thee?
Thou art bound about with stately strengths for
bands:

What strength shall keep thee from my strengthless
hands?

Thou art girt about with goodly guards and great:
What fosse may fence thee round as deep as hate?

THE WIFE'S VIGIL

Thou art wise: will wisdom teach thee fear of me?
Thou art great of heart: shall this deliver thee?
What wall so massive, or what tower so high,
Shall be thy surety that thou shouldst not die,
If that which comes against thee be but I?
Who shall rise up of power to take thy part,
What skill find strength to save, what strength find
art,

If that which wars against thee be my heart?
Not iron, nor the might of force afield,
Nor edge of sword, nor sheltering weight of shield,
Nor all thy fame since all thy praise began,
Nor all the love and laud thou hast of man,
Nor, though his noiseless hours with wool be shod,
Shall God's love keep thee from the wrath of God.
O son of sorrows, hast thou said at heart,
Haply, God loves thee, God shall take thy part,
Who hath all these years endured thee, since thy
birth

From sorrow's womb bade sin be born on earth?
So long he hath cast his buckler over thee,
Shall he not surely guard thee even from me?
Yea, but if yet he give thee while I live
Into mine hands as he shall surely give,
Ere death at last bring darkness on thy face,
Call then on him, call not on me for grace,
Cast not away one prayer, one suppliant breath,
On me that commune all this while with death.
For I that was not and that was thy wife
Desire not but one hour of all thy life
Wherein to triumph till that hour be past;
But this mine hour I look for is thy last."

THE WIFE'S VIGIL

So mused she till the fire in sea and sky
Sank, and the northwest wind spake harsh on high,
And like the sea's heart waxed her heart that heard,
Strong, dark, and bitter, till the keen wind's word
Seemed of her own soul spoken, and the breath
All round her not of darkness, but of death.

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

ENOUGH of ease, O Love, enough of light,
Enough of rest before the shadow of night.
Strong Love, whom death finds feebler; kingly Love,
Whom time discrowns in season, seeing thy dove
Spell-stricken by the serpent; for thy sake
These that saw light see night's dawn only break,
Night's cup filled up with slumber, whence men think
The draught more dread than thine was dire to drink.
O Love, thy day sets darkling: hope and fear
Fall from thee standing stern as death stands here.

For what have these to do with fear or hope
On whom the gates of outer darkness ope,
On whom the door of life's desire is barred?
Past like a cloud, their days in Joyous Gard
Gleam like a cloud the westering sun stains red
Till all the blood of day's blithe heart be bled
And all night's heart requickened; in their eyes
So flame and fade those far memorial skies,
So shines the moorland, so revives the sea,
Whereon they gazing mused of things to be
And wist not more of them than waters know
What wind with next day's change of tide shall
blow.

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

Dark roll the deepening days whose waves divide
Unseasonably, with storm-struck change of tide,
Tristram from Iseult: nor may sorrow say
If better wind shall blow than yesterday
With next day risen or any day to come.
For ere the songs of summer's death fell dumb,
And autumn bade the imperial moorlands change
Their purples, and the bracken's bloom grow strange
As hope's green blossom touched with time's harsh
rust,

Was all their joy of life shaken to dust,
And all its fire made ashes: by the strand
Where late they strayed and communed hand from
hand

For the last time fell separate, eyes of eyes
Took for the last time leave, and saw the skies
Dark with their deep division. The last time—
The last that ever love's rekindling rhyme
Should keep for them life's days and nights in tune
With refluence of the morning and the moon
Alternative in music, and make one
The secrets of the stardawn and the sun
For these twain souls ere darkness held them fast;
The last before the labour marked for last
And toil of utmost knighthood, till the wage
Of rest might crown his crowning pilgrimage
Whereon forth faring must he take farewell,
With spear for staff and sword for scallop-shell
And scrip wherein close memory hoarded yet
Things holier held than death might well forget;
The last time ere the travel were begun
Whose goal is un beholden of the sun,

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

The last wherewith love's eyes might yet be lit,
Came, and they could but dream they knew not it.

For Tristram parting from her wist at heart
How well she wist they might not choose but part,
And he pass forth a pilgrim, when there came
A sound of summons in the high king's name
For succour toward his vassal Triamour,
King in wild Wales, now spoiled of all his power,
As Tristram's father ere his fair son's birth,
By one the strongest of the sons of earth,
Urgan, an iron bulk of giant mould:
And Iseult in Tintagel as of old
Sat crowned with state and sorrow: for her lord
At Arthur's hand required her back restored,
And willingly compelled against her will
She yielded, saying within her own soul still
Some season yet of soft or stormier breath
Should haply give her life again or death:
For now nor quick nor dead nor bright nor dark
Were all her nights and days wherein King Mark
Held haggard watch upon her, and his eyes
Were cloudier than the gradual wintering skies
That closed about the wan wild land and sea.
And bitter toward him waxed her heart: but he
Was rent in twain betwixt harsh love and hate
With pain and passion half compassionate
That yearned and laboured to be quit of shame,
And could not: and his life grew smouldering flame,
And hers a cloud full-charged with storm and
shower,
Though touched with trembling gleams of fire's
bright flower

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

That flashed and faded on its fitful verge,
As hope would strive with darkness and emerge
And sink, a swimmer strangled by the swallowing
surge.

But Tristram by dense hills and deepening vales
Rode through the wild glad wastes of glorious Wales,
High-hearted with desire of happy fight
And strong in soul with merrier sense of might
Than since the fair first years that hailed him
knight:

For all his will was toward the war, so long
Had love repressed and wrought his glory wrong,
So far the triumph and so fair the praise
Seemed now that kindled all his April days.
And here in bright blown autumn, while his life
Was summer's yet for strength toward love or strife,
Blithe waxed his hope toward battle, and high desire
To pluck once more as out of circling fire
Fame, the broad flower whose breath makes death
more sweet

Than roses crushed by love's receding feet.
But all the lovely land wherein he went
The blast of ruin and ravenous war had rent;
And black with fire the fields where homesteads were,
And foul with festering dead the high soft air,
And loud with wail of women many a stream
Whose own live song was like love's deepening
dream,

Spake all against the spoiler: wherefore still
Wrath waxed with pity, quickening all his will,
In Tristram's heart for every league he rode
Through the aching land so broad a curse bestrode

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

With so supreme a shadow: till one dawn
Above the green bloom of a gleaming lawn,
High on the strait steep windy bridge that spanned
A glen's deep mouth, he saw that shadow stand
Visible, sword on thigh and mace in hand
Vast as the mid bulk of a roof-tree's beam.
So, sheer above the wild wolf-haunted stream,
Dire as the face disfeatured of a dream,
Rose Urgan: and his eyes were night and flame;
But like the fiery dawn were his that came
Against him, lit with more sublime desire
Than lifts toward heaven the leaping heart of fire:
And strong in vantage of his perilous place
The huge high presence, red as earth's first race,
Reared like a reed the might up of his mace,
And smote: but lightly Tristram swerved, and
drove

Right in on him, whose void stroke only clove
Air, and fell wide, thundering athwart: and he
Sent forth a stormier cry than wind or sea
When midnight takes the tempest for her lord;
And all the glen's throat seemed as hell's that
roared;

But high like heaven's light over hell shone Tris-
tram's sword,

Falling, and bright as storm shows God's bare brand
Flashed as it shore sheer off the huge right hand
Whose strength was as the shadow of death on all
that land.

And like the trunk of some grim tree sawn through
Reeled Urgan, as his left hand grasped and drew
A steel by sorcerers tempered: and anew

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

Raged the red wind of fluctuant fight, till all
The cliffs were thrilled as by the clangorous call
Of storm's blown trumpets from the core of night,
Charging: and even as with the storm-wind's might
On Tristram's helm that sword crashed: and the
knight

Fell, and his arms clashed, and a wide cry brake
From those far off that heard it, for his sake
Soul-stricken: and that bulk of monstrous birth
Sent forth again a cry more dire for mirth:
But ere the sunbright arms were soiled of earth
They flashed again, re-risen: and swift and loud
Rang the strokes out as from a circling cloud,
So dense the dust wrought over them its drifted
shroud.

Strong strokes, within the mist their battle made,
Each hailed on other through the shifting shade
That clung about them hurtling as the swift fight
swayed:

And each between the jointed corslet saw
Break forth his foe's bright blood at each grim flaw
Steel made in hammered iron: till again
The fiend put forth his might more strong for pain
And cleft the great knight's glittering shield in
twain,

Laughing for very wrath and thirst to kill,
A beast's broad laugh of blind and wolfish will,
And smote again ere Tristram's lips drew breath
Panting, and swept as by the sense of death,
That surely should have touched and sealed them
fast

Save that the sheer stroke shrilled aside, and passed

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

Frustrate: but answering Tristram smote anew,
And thrust the brute breast as with lightning through
Clean with one cleaving stroke of perfect might:
And violently the vast bulk leapt upright,
And plunged over the bridge, and fell: and all
The cliffs reverberate from his monstrous fall
Rang: and the land by Tristram's grace was free.
So with high laud and honour thence went he,
And southward set his sail again, and passed
The lone land's ending, first beheld and last
Of eyes that look on England from the sea:
And his heart mourned within him, knowing how
she

Whose heart with his was fatefully made fast
Sat now fast bound, as though some charm were
cast

About her, such a brief space eastward thence,
And yet might soul not break the bonds of sense
And bring her to him in very life and breath
More than had this been even the sea of death
That washed between them, and its wide sweet
light

The dim strait's darkness of the narrowing night
That shuts about men dying whose souls put forth
To pierce its passage through: but south and north
Alike for him were other than they were:
For all the northward coast shone smooth and fair,
And off its iron cliffs the keen-edged air
Blew summer, kindling from her mute bright mouth;
But winter breathed out of the murmuring south,
Where, pale with wrathful watch on passing ships,
The lone wife lay in wait with wan dumb lips.

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

Yet, sailing where the shoreward ripple curled
Of the most wild sweet waves in all the world,
His soul took comfort even for joy to see
The strong deep joy of living sun and sea,
The large deep love of living sea and land,
As past the lonely lion-guarded strand
Where that huge warder lifts his couchant sides,
Asleep, above the sleepless lapse of tides,
The light sail swept, and past the unsounded caves
Unsearchable, wherein the pulse of waves
Throbs through perpetual darkness to and fro,
And the blind night swims heavily below
While heavily the strong noon broods above,
Even to the very bay whence very Love,
Strong daughter of the giant gods who wrought
Sun, earth, and sea out of their procreant thought,
Most meetly might have risen, and most divine
Beheld and heard things round her sound and shine
From floors of foam and gold to walls of serpentine.
For splendid as the limbs of that supreme
Incarnate beauty through men's visions gleam,
Whereof all fairest things are even but shadow or
dream,
And lovely like as Love's own heavenliest face,
Gleams there and glows the presence and the grace
Even of the mother of all, in perfect pride of place.
For otherwhere beneath our world-wide sky
There may not be beheld of men that die
Aught else like this that dies not, nor may stress
Of ages that bow down men's works make less
The exultant awe that clothes with power its love-
liness.

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

For who sets eye thereon soever knows
How since these rocks and waves first rolled and rose
The marvel of their many-coloured might
Hath borne this record sensible to sight,
The witness and the symbol of their own delight,
The gospel graven of life's most heavenly law,
Joy, brooding on its own still soul with awe,
A sense of godlike rest in godlike strife,
The sovereign conscience of the spirit of life.
Nor otherwhere on strand or mountain tower
Hath such fair beauty shining forth in flower
Put on the imperial robe of such imperious power.
For all the radiant rocks from depth to height
Burn with vast bloom of glories blossom-bright
As though the sun's own hand had thrilled them
through with light
And stained them through with splendour: yet from
thence
Such awe strikes rapture through the spirit of sense
From all the inaccessible sea-wall's girth,
That exultation, bright at heart as mirth,
Bows deeper down before the beauty of earth
Than fear may bow down ever: nor shall one
Who meets at Alpine dawn the mounting sun
On heights too high for many a wing to climb
Be touched with sense of aught seen more sublime
Than here smiles high and sweet in face of heaven
and time.
For here the flower of fire, the soft hoar bloom
Of springtide olive-woods, the warm green gloom
Of clouded seas that swell and sound with dawn of
doom,

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

The keen thwart lightning and the wan grey light
Of stormy sunrise crossed and vexed with night,
Flash, loom, and laugh with divers hues in one
From all the curved cliff's face, till day be done,
Against the sea's face and the gazing sun.
And whensoever a strong wave, high in hope,
Sweeps up some smooth slant breadth of stone
aslope,

That glowed with duskier fire of hues less bright,
Swift as it sweeps back springs to sudden sight
The splendour of the moist rock's fervent light,
Fresh as from dew of birth when time was born
Out of the world-conceiving womb of morn.
All its quenched flames and darkling hues divine
Leap into lustrous life and laugh and shine
And darken into swift and dim decline
For one brief breath's space till the next wave run
Right up, and ripple down again, undone,
And leave it to be kissed and kindled of the sun.
And all these things, bright as they shone before
Man first set foot on earth or sail from shore,
Rose not less radiant than the sun sees now
When the autumn sea was cloven of Tristram's
prow,

And strong in sorrow and hope and woful will
That hope might move not nor might sorrow kill
He held his way back toward the wild sad shore
Whence he should come to look on these no more,
Nor ever¹ save with sunless eyes shut fast,
Sail home to sleep in home-born earth at last.

And all these things fled fleet as light or breath
Past, and his heart waxed cold and dull as death,

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

Or swelled but as the tides of sorrow swell,
To sink with sullen sense of slow farewell.
So surely seemed the silence even to sigh
Assurance of inveterate prophecy,
"Thou shalt not come again home hither ere thou
die."

And the wind mourned and triumphed, and the
sea

Wailed and took heart and trembled; nor might he
Hear more of comfort in their speech, or see
More certitude in all the waste world's range
Than the only certitude of death and change.
And as the sense and semblance fluctuated
Of all things heard and seen alive or dead
That smote far off upon his ears or eyes
Or memory mixed with forecasts fain to rise
And fancies faint as ghostliest prophecies,
So seemed his own soul, changefully forlorn,
To shrink and triumph and mount up and mourn;
Yet all its fitful waters, clothed with night,
Lost heart not wholly, lacked not wholly light,
Seeing over life and death one star in sight
Where evening's gates as fair as morning's ope,
Whose name was memory, but whose flame was
hope.

For all the tides of thought that rose and sank
Felt its fair strength wherefrom strong sorrow
shrank

A mightier trust than time could change or cloy,
More strong than sorrow, more secure than joy.
So came he, nor content nor all unblest,
Back to the grey old land of Merlin's rest.

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

But ere six paces forth on shore he trod
Before him stood a knight with feet unshod,
And kneeling called upon him, as on God
Might sick men call for pity, praying aloud
With hands held up and head made bare and bowed;
“Tristram, for God’s love and thine own dear fame,
I Tristram that am one with thee in name
And one in heart with all that praise thee—I,
Most woful man of all that may not die
For heartbreak and the heavier scourge of shame,
By all thy glory done our woful name
Beseech thee, called of all men gentlest knight,
Be now not slow to do my sorrows right.
I charge thee for thy fame’s sake through this land,
I pray thee by thine own wife’s fair white hand,
Have pity of me whose love is borne away
By one that makes of poor men’s lives his prey,
A felon masked with knighthood: at his side
Seven brethren hath he night or day to ride
With seven knights more that wait on all his will:
And here at hand, ere yet one day fulfil
Its flight through light and darkness, shall they fare
Forth, and my bride among them, whom they bear
Through these wild lands his prisoner; and if now
I lose her, and my prayer be vain, and thou
Less fain to serve love’s servants than of yore,
Then surely shall I see her face no more.
But if thpu wilt, for love’s sake of the bride
Who lay most loved of women at thy side,
Strike with me, straight then hence behoves us ride
And rest between the moorside and the sea
Where we may smite them passing: but for me,

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

Poor stranger, me not worthy scarce to touch
Thy kind strong hand, how shouldst thou do so
much?

For now lone left this long time waits thy wife
And lacks her lord and light of wedded life
Whilst thou far off art famous: yet thy fame,
If thou take pity on me that bear thy name
Unworthily, but by that name implore
Thy grace, how shall not even thy fame grow
more?

But be thy will as God's among us done,
Who art far in fame above us as the sun:
Yet only of him have all men help and grace."

And all the lordly light of Tristram's face
Was softened as the sun's in kindly spring.
"Nay, then may God send me as evil a thing
When I give ear not to such prayers," he said,
"And make my place among the nameless dead
When I put back one hour the time to smite
And do the unrighteous griefs of good men right,
Behold, I will not enter in nor rest
Here in mine own halls till this piteous quest
Find end ere noon to-morrow: but do thou,
Whose sister's face I may not look on now,
Go, Ganhardine, with tiding of the vow
That bids me turn aside for one day's strife
Or live dishonoured all my days of life,
And greet for me in brother's wise my wife,
And crave her pardon that for knighthood's sake
And womanhood's, whose bands may no man break
And keep the bands of bounden honour fast,
I seek not her till two nights yet be past

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

And this my quest accomplished, so God please
By me to give this young man's anguish ease
And on his wrongdoer's head his wrong requite."

And Tristram with that woful thankful knight
Rode by the seaside moorland wastes away
Between the quickening night and darkening day
Ere half the gathering stars had heart to shine.
And lightly toward his sister Ganhardine
Sped, where she sat and gazed alone afar
Above the grey sea for the sunset star,
And lightly kissed her hand and lightly spake
His tiding of that quest for knighthood's sake.
And the white-handed Iseult, bowing her head,
Gleamed on him with a glance athwart, and said,
"As God's on earth and far above the sun,
So toward his handmaid be my lord's will done."
And doubts too dim to question or divine
Touched as with shade the spirit of Ganhardine,
Hearing; and scarce for half a doubtful breath
His bright light heart held half a thought of death
And knew not whence this darkling thought might
be,

But surely not his sister's work: for she
Was ever sweet and good as summer air,
And soft as dew when all the night is fair,
And gracious as the golden maiden moon
When darkness craves her blessing: so full soon
His mind was light again as leaping waves,
Nor dreamed that hers was like a field of graves
Where no man's foot dares swerve to left or right,
Nor ear dares hearken, nor dares eye take sight
Of aught that moves and murmurs there at night.

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

But by the sea-banks where at morn their foes
Might find them, lay those knightly name-fellows,
One sick with grief of heart and sleepless, one
With heart of hope triumphant as the sun
Dreaming asleep of love and fame and fight:
But sleep at last wrapped warm the wan young
knight;

And Tristram with the first pale windy light
Woke ere the sun spake summons, and his ear
Caught the sea's call that fired his heart to hear,
A noise of waking waters: for till dawn
The sea was silent as a mountain lawn
When the wind speaks not, and the pines are dumb,
And summer takes her fill ere autumn come
Of life more soft than slumber: but ere day
Rose, and the first beam smote the bounding bay,
Up sprang the strength of the dark East, and took
With its wide wings the waters as they shook,
And hurled them huddling on aheap, and cast
The full sea shoreward with a great glad blast,
Blown from the heart of morning: and with joy
Full-souled and perfect passion, as a boy
That leaps up light to wrestle with the sea
For pure heart's gladness and large ecstasy,
Up sprang the might of Tristram; and his soul
Yearned for delight within him, and waxed whole
As a young child's with rapture of the hour
That brought his spirit and all the world to flower,
And all the bright blood in his veins beat time
To the wind's clarion and the water's chime
That called him and he followed it and stood
On the sand's verge before the grey great flood

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

Where the white hurtling heads of waves that met
Rose unsaluted of the sunrise yet.

And from his heart's root outward shot the sweet
Strong joy that thrilled him to the hands and
feet,

Filling his limbs with pleasure and glad might,
And his soul drank the immeasurable delight
That earth drinks in with morning, and the free
Limitless love that lifts the stirring sea
When on her bare bright bosom as a bride
She takes the young sun, perfect in his pride,
Home to his place with passion: and the heart
Trembled for joy within the man whose part
Was here not least in living; and his mind
Was rapt abroad beyond man's meaner kind
And pierced with love of all things and with mirth
Moved to make one with heaven and heavenlike
earth

And with the light live water. So awhile
He watched the dim sea with a deepening smile,
And felt the sound and savour and swift flight
Of waves that fled beneath the fading night
And died before the darkness, like a song
With harps between and trumpets blown along
Through the loud air of some triumphant day,
Sink through his spirit and purge all sense away
Save of the glorious gladness of his hour
And all the world about to break in flower
Before the sovereign laughter of the sun;
And he, ere night's wide work lay all undone,
As earth from her bright body casts off night,
Cast off his raiment for a rapturous fight

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

And stood between the sea's edge and the sea
Naked, and godlike of his mould as he
Whose swift foot's sound shook all the towers of
Troy;

So clothed with might, so girt upon with joy,
As, ere the knife had shorn to feed the fire
His glorious hair before the unkindled pyre
Whereon the half of his great heart was laid,
Stood, in the light of his live limbs arrayed,
Child of heroic earth and heavenly sea,
The flower of all men: scarce less bright than he,
If any of all men latter-born might stand,
Stood Tristram, silent, on the glimmering strand.
Not long: but with a cry of love that rang
As from a trumpet golden-mouthed, he sprang,
As toward a mother's where his head might rest
Her child rejoicing, toward the strong sea's breast
That none may gird nor measure: and his heart
Sent forth a shout that bade his lips not part,
But triumphed in him silent: no man's voice,
No song, no sound of clarions that rejoice,
Can set that glory forth which fills with fire
The body and soul that have their whole desire
Silent, and freer than birds or dreams are free
Take all their will of all the encountering sea.
And toward the foam he bent and forward smote,
Laughing, and launched his body like a boat
Full to the sea-breach, and against the tide
Struck strongly forth with amorous arms made
wide

To take the bright breast of the wave to his
And on his lips the sharp sweet minute's kiss

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

Given of the wave's lip for a breath's space curled
And pure as at the daydawn of the world.

And round him all the bright rough shuddering sea
Kindled, as though the world were even as he,
Heart-stung with exultation of desire:

And all the life that moved him seemed to aspire,
As all the sea's life toward the sun: and still
Delight within him waxed with quickening will
More smooth and strong and perfect as a flame
That springs and spreads, till each glad limb be-
came

A note of rapture in the tune of life,
Live music mild and keen as sleep and strife:
Till the sweet change that bids the sense grow sure
Of deeper depth and purity more pure
Wrapped him and lapped him round with clearer
cold,

And all the rippling green grew royal gold
Between him and the far sun's rising rim.
And like the sun his heart rejoiced in him,
And brightened with a broadening flame of mirth:
And hardly seemed its life a part of earth,
But the life kindled of a fiery birth
And passion of a new-begotten son
Between the live sea and the living sun.
And mightier grew the joy to meet full-faced
Each wave, and mount with upward plunge, and
taste

The rapture of its rolling strength, and cross
Its flickering crown of snows that flash and toss
Like plumes in battle's blithest charge, and thence
To match the next with yet more strenuous sense;

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

Till on his eyes the light beat hard and bade
His face turn west and shoreward through the glad
Swift revel of the waters golden-clad,
And back with light reluctant heart he bore
Across the broad-backed rollers in to shore;
Strong-spirited for the chance and cheer of fight,
And donned his arms again, and felt the might
In all his limbs rejoice for strength, and praised
God for such life as that whereon he gazed,
And wist not surely its joy was even as fleet
As that which laughed and lapsed against his feet,
The bright thin grey foam-blossom, glad and hoar,
That flings its flower along the flowerless shore
On sand or shingle, and still with sweet strange
snows,

As where one great white storm-dishevelled rose
May rain her wild leaves on a windy land,
Strews for long leagues the sounding slope of strand,
And flower on flower falls flashing, and anew
A fresh light leaps up whence the last flash flew,
And casts its brief glad gleam of life away
To fade not flowerwise but as drops the day
Storm-smitten, when at once the dark devours
Heaven and the sea and earth with all their flowers;
No star in heaven, on earth no rose to see,
But the white blown brief blossoms of the sea,
That make her green gloom starrier than the sky,
Dance yet before the tempest's tune, and die.
And all these things he glanced upon, and knew
How fair they shone, from earth's least flake of dew
To stretch of seas and imminence of skies,
Unwittingly, with unpresageful eyes,

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

For the last time. The world's half heavenly face,
The music of the silence of the place,
The confluence and the reflux of the sea,
The wind's note ringing over wold and lea,
Smote once more through him keen as fire that
smote,

Rang once more through him one reverberate note,
That faded as he turned again and went,
Fulfilled by strenuous joy with strong content,
To take his last delight of labour done
That yet should be beholden of the sun
Or ever give man comfort of his hand.

Beside a wood's edge in the broken land
An hour at wait the twain together stood,
Till swift between the moorside and the wood
Flashed the spears forward of the coming train;
And seeing beside the strong chief spoiler's rein
His wan love riding prisoner in the crew,
Forth with a cry the young man leapt, and flew
Right on that felon sudden as a flame;
And hard at hand the mightier Tristram came,
Bright as the sun and terrible as fire:
And there had sword and spear their souls' desire,
And blood that quenched the spear's thirst as it
poured

Slaked royally the hunger of the sword,
Till the fierce heart of steel could scarce fulfil
Its greed and ravin of insatiate will.
For three the fiery spear of Tristram drove
Down ere a point of theirs his harness clove
Or its own sheer mid shaft splintered in twain;
And his heart bounded in him, and was fain

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

As fire or wind that takes its fill by night
Of tempest and of triumph: so the knight
Rejoiced and ranged among them, great of hand,
Till seven lay slain upon the heathery sand
Or in the dense breadth of the woodside fern.
Nor did his heart not mightier in him burn
Seeing at his hand that young knight fallen, and
high

The red sword reared again that bade him die.
But on the slayer exulting like the flame
Whose foot foreshines the thunder Tristram came
Raging, for piteous wrath had made him fire;
And as a lion's look his face was dire
That flashed against his foeman ere the sword
Lightened, and wrought the heart's will of its lord,
And clove through casque and crown the wrong-
doer's head.

And right and left about their dark chief dead
Hurtled and hurled those felons to and fro,
Till as a storm-wind scatters leaves and snow
His right hand ravening scattered them; but one
That fled with sidelong glance athwart the sun
Shot, and the shaft flew sure, and smote aright,
Full in the wound's print of his great first fight
When at his young strength's peril he made free
Cornwall, and slew beside its bordering sea
The fair land's foe, who yielding up his breath
Yet left him wounded nigh to dark slow death.
And hardly with long toil thence he won home
Between the grey moor and the glimmering foam,
And halting fared through his own gate, and fell,
Thirsting: for as the sleepless fire of hell

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

The fire within him of his wound again
Burned, and his face was dark as death for pain,
And blind the blithe light of his eyes: but they
Within that watched and wist not of the fray
Came forth and cried aloud on him for woe.
And scarce aloud his thanks fell faint and slow
As men reared up the strong man fallen and bore
Down the deep hall that looked along the shore,
And laid him soft abed, and sought in vain
If herb or hand of leech might heal his pain.
And the white-handed Iseult hearkening heard
All, and drew nigh, and spake no wifely word,
But gazed upon him doubtfully, with eyes
Clouded; and he in kindly knightly wise
Spake with scant breath, and smiling: "Surely this
Is penance for discourteous lips to kiss
And feel the brand burn through them, here to lie
And lack the strength here to do more than sigh
And hope not hence for pardon." Then she bowed
Her head, still silent as a stooping cloud,
And laid her lips against his face; and he
Felt sink a shadow across him as the sea
Might feel a cloud stoop toward it: and his heart
Darkened as one that wastes by sorcerous art
And knows not whence it withers: and he turned
Back from her emerald eyes his own, and yearned
All night for eyes all golden: and the dark
Hung sleepless round him till the loud first lark
Rang record forth once more of darkness done,
And all things born took comfort from the sun.

THE SAILING OF THE SWAN

FATE, that was born ere spirit and flesh were made,
The fire that fills man's life with light and shade;
The power beyond all godhead which puts on
All forms of multitudinous unison,
A raiment of eternal change inwrought
With shapes and hues more subtly spun than
thought,

Where all things old bear fruit of all things new
And one deep chord throbs all the music through,
The chord of change unchanging, shadow and light
Inseparable as reverberate day from night;
Fate, that of all things save the soul of man
Is lord and God since body and soul began;
Fate, that keeps all the tune of things in chime;
Fate, that breathes power upon the lips of time;
That smites and soothes with heavy and healing
hand

All joys and sorrows born in life's dim land,
Till joy be found a shadow and sorrow a breath
And life no discord in the tune with death,
But all things fain alike to die and live
In pulse and lapse of tides alternative,

THE SAILING OF THE SWAN

Through silence and through sound of peace and
strife,

Till birth and death be one in sight of life;
Fate, heard and seen of no man's eyes or ears,
To no man shown through light of smiles or tears,
And moved of no man's prayer to fold its wings;
Fate, that is night and light on worldly things;
Fate, that is fire to burn and sea to drown,
Strength to build up and thunder to cast down;
Fate, shield and screen for each man's lifelong head,
And sword at last or dart that strikes it dead;
Fate, higher than heaven and deeper than the grave,
That saves and spares not, spares and doth not
save;

Fate, that in gods' wise is not bought and sold
For prayer or price of penitence or gold;
Whose law shall live when life bids earth farewell,
Whose justice hath for shadows heaven and hell;
Whose judgment into no god's hand is given,
Nor is its doom not more than hell or heaven:
Fate, that is pure of love and clean of hate,
Being equal-eyed as nought may be but fate;
Through many and weary days of foiled desire
Leads life to rest where tears no more take fire;
Through many and weary dreams of quenched de-
light
Leads life through death past sense of day and
night.

Nor shall they feel or fear, whose date is done,
Aught that made once more dark the living sun
And bitterer in their breathing lips the breath
Than the dark dawn and bitter dust of death.

THE SAILING OF THE SWAN

For all the light, with fragrance as of flowers,
That clothes the lithe live limbs of separate hours,
More sweet to savour and more clear to sight
Dawns on the soul death's undivided night.
No vigils has that perfect night to keep,
No fever-fits of vision shake that sleep.
Nor if they wake, and any place there be
Wherein the soul may feel her wings beat free
Through air too clear and still for sound or strife;
If life were haply death, and death be life;
If love with yet some lovelier laugh revive,
And song relume the light it bore alive,
And friendship, found of all earth's gifts most good,
Stand perfect in perpetual brotherhood;
If aught indeed at all of all this be,
Though none might say nor any man might see,
Might he that sees the shade thereof not say
This dream were trustier than the truth of day.
Nor haply may not hope, with heart more clear,
Burn deathward, and the doubtful soul take cheer,
Seeing through the channelled darkness yearn a star
Whose eyebeams are not as the morning's are,
Transient, and subjugate of lordlier light,
But all unconquerable by noon or night,
Being kindled only of life's own inmost fire,
Truth, stablished and made sure by strong desire,
Fountain of all things living, source and seed,
Force that perforce transfigures dream to deed,
God that begets on time, the body of death,
Eternity: nor may man's darkening breath,
Albeit it stain, disfigure or destroy
The glass wherein the soul sees life and joy

THE SAILING OF THE SWAN

Only, with strength renewed and spirit of youth,
And brighter than the sun's the body of Truth
Eternal, unimaginable of man,
Whose very face not Thought's own eyes may scan,
But see far off his radiant feet at least,
Trampling the head of Fear, the false high priest,
Whose broken chalice foams with blood no more,
And prostrate on that high priest's chancel floor,
Bruised, overthrown, blind, maimed, with bloodless
rod,

The miscreation of his miscreant God.
That sovereign shadow cast of souls that dwell
In darkness and the prison-house of hell
Whose walls are built of deadly dread, and bound
The gates thereof with dreams as iron round,
And all the bars therein and stanchions wrought
Of shadow forged like steel and tempered thought
And words like swords and thunder-clouded creeds
And faiths more dire than sin's most direful deeds:
That shade accursed and worshipped, which hath
made

The soul of man that brought it forth a shade
Black as the womb of darkness, void and vain,
A throne for fear, a pasturage for pain,
Impotent, abject, clothed upon with lies,
A foul blind fume of words and prayers that rise,
Aghast and harsh, abhorrent and abhorred,
Fierce as its God, blood-saturate as its Lord;
With loves and mercies on its lips that hiss
Comfort, and kill compassion with a kiss,
And strike the world black with their blasting breath;
That ghost whose core of life is very death

THE SAILING OF THE SWAN

And all its light of heaven a shadow of hell,
Fades, falls, wanes, withers by none other spell
But theirs whose eyes and ears have seen and heard
Not the face naked, not the perfect word,
But the bright sound and feature felt from far
Of life which feeds the spirit and the star,
Thrills the live light of all the suns that roll,
And stirs the still sealed springs of every soul.

Three dim days through, three slumberless nights
long,
Perplexed at dawn, oppressed at evensong,
The strong man's soul now sealed indeed with pain,
And all its springs half dried with drought, had lain
Prisoner within the fleshly dungeon-dress
Sore chafed and wasted with its weariness.
And fain it would have found the star, and fain
Made this funereal prison-house of pain
A watch-tower whence its eyes might sweep, and see
If any place for any hope might be
Beyond the hells and heavens of sleep and strife,
Or any light at all of any life
Beyond the dense false darkness woven above,
And could not, lacking grace to look on love,
And in the third night's dying hour he spake,
Seeing scarce the seals that bound the dayspring
break

And scarce the daystar burn above the sea:
"O Ganhardine, my brother true to me,
I charge thee by those nights and days we knew
No great while since in England, by the dew
That bathed those nights with blessing, and the fire
That thrilled those days as music thrills a lyre,

THE SAILING OF THE SWAN

Do now for me perchance the last good deed
That ever love may crave or life may need
Ere love lay life in ashes: take to thee
My ship that shows aloft against the sea
Carved on her stem the semblance of a swan,
And ere the waves at even again wax wan
Pass, if it may be, to my lady's land,
And give this ring into her secret hand,
And bid her think how hard on death I lie,
And fain would look upon her face and die.
But as a merchant's laden be the bark
With royal ware for fraughtage, that King Mark
May take for toll thereof some costly thing;
And when this gift finds grace before the king,
Choose forth a cup, and put therein my ring
Where sureliest only of one it may be seen,
And bid her handmaid bear it to the queen
For earnest of thine homage: then shall she
Fear, and take counsel privily with thee,
To know what errand there is thine from me
And what my need in secret of her sight.
But make thee two sails, one like sea-foam white
To spread for signal if thou bring her back,
And if she come not see the sail be black,
That I may know or ever thou take land
If these my lips may die upon her hand
Or hers may never more be mixed with mine."

And his heart quailed for grief in Ganhardine,
Hearing; and all his brother bade he swore
Surely to do, and straight fare forth from shore.
But the white-handed Iseult hearkening heard
All, and her heart waxed hot, and every word

THE SAILING OF THE SWAN

Thereon seemed graven and printed in her thought
As lines with fire and molten iron wrought.
And hard within her heavy heart she cursed
Both, and her life was turned to fiery thirst,
And all her soul was hunger, and its breath
Of hope and life a blast of raging death.
For only in hope of evil was her life.
So bitter burned within the unchilded wife
A virgin lust for vengeance, and such hate
Wrought in her now the fervent work of fate.

Then with a south-west wind the Swan set forth,
And over wintering waters bore to north,
And round the wild land's windy westward end
Up the blown channel bade her bright way bend
East on toward high Tintagel: where at dark
Landing, fair welcome found they of King Mark,
And Ganhardine with Brangwain as of old
Spake, and she took the cup of chiselled gold
Wherein lay secret Tristram's trothplight ring,
And bare it un beholden of the king
Even to her lady's hand, which hardly took
A gift whereon a queen's eyes well might look,
With grace forlorn of weary gentleness.
But, seeing, her life leapt in her, keen to guess
The secret of the symbol: and her face
Flashed bright with blood whence all its grief-worn
 grace
Took fire and kindled to the quivering hair.
And in the dark soft hour of starriest air
Thrilled through with sense of midnight, when the
 world
Feels the wide wings of sleep about it furled,

THE SAILING OF THE SWAN

Down stole the queen, deep-muffled to her wan
Mute restless lips, and came where yet the Swan
Swung fast at anchor: whence by starlight she
Hoised snowbright sails, and took the glimmering
sea.

But all the long night long more keen and sore
His wound's grief waxed in Tristram evermore,
And heavier always hung his heart asway
Between dim fear and clouded hope of day.
And still with face and heart at silent strife
Beside him watched the maiden called his wife,
Patient, and spake not save when scarce he spake,
Murmuring with sense distraught and spirit awake
Speech bitterer than the words thereof were sweet:
And hatred thrilled her to the hands and feet,
Listening: for alway back reiterate came
The passionate faint burden of her name.
Nor ever through the labouring lips astir
Came any word of any thought of her.
But the soul wandering struggled and clung hard
Only to dreams of joy in Joyous Gard
Or wildwood nights beside the Cornish strand,
Or Merlin's holier sleep here hard at hand
Wrapped round with deep soft spells in dim Broce-
liande.
And with such thirst as joy's drained wine-cup
leaves
When fear to hope as hope to memory cleaves
His soul desired the dewy sense of leaves,
The soft green smell of thickets drenched with
dawn.
The faint slot kindling on the fiery lawn

THE SAILING OF THE SWAN

As day's first hour made keen the spirit again
That lured and spurred on quest his hound Hodain,
The breeze, the bloom, the splendour and the sound,
That stung like fire the hunter and the hound,
The pulse of wind, the passion of the sea,
The rapture of the woodland: then would he
Sigh, and as one that fain would all be dead
Heavily turn his heavy-laden head
Back, and close eyes for comfort, finding none.
And fain he would have died or seen the sun,
Being sick at heart of darkness: yet afresh
Began the long strong strife of spirit and flesh
And branching pangs of thought whose branches bear
The bloodred fruit whose core is black, despair.
And the wind slackened and again grew great,
Palpitant as men's pulses palpitate
Between the flowing and ebbing tides of fate
That wash their lifelong waifs of weal and woe
Through night and light and twilight to and fro.
Now as a pulse of hope its heartbeat throbbed,
Now like one stricken shrank and sank and sobbed,
Then, yearning as with child of death, put forth
A wail that filled the night up south and north
With woful sound of waters: and he said,
"So might the wind wail if the world were dead
And its wings wandered over nought but sea.
I would I knew she would not come to me,
For surely she will come not: then should I,
Once knowing I shall not look upon her, die.
I knew not life could so long breathe such breath
As I do. Nay, what grief were this, if death,
The sole sure friend of whom the whole world saith

THE SAILING OF THE SWAN

He lies not, nor hath ever this been said,
That death would heal not grief—if death were
 dead
And all ways closed whence grief might pass with
 life!"

Then softly spake his watching virgin wife
Out of her heart, deep down below her breath:
"Fear not but death shall come—and after death
Judgment." And he that heard not answered her,
Saying—"Ah, but one there was, if truth not err,
For true men's trustful tongues have said it—one
Whom these mine eyes knew living while the sun
Looked yet upon him, and mine own ears heard
The deep sweet sound once of his godlike word—
Who sleeps and dies not, but with soft live breath
Takes always all the deep delight of death,
Through love's gift of a woman: but for me
Love's hand is not the hand of Nimue,
Love's word no still smooth murmur of the dove,
No kiss of peace for me the kiss of love.
Nor, whatsoe'er thy life's love ever give,
Dear, shall it ever bid me sleep or live;
Nor from thy brows and lips and living breast
As his from Nimue's shall my soul take rest;
Not rest but unrest hath our long love given—
Unrest on earth that wins not rest in heaven.
What rest may we take ever? what have we
Had ever more of peace than has the sea?
Has not our life been as a wind that blows
Through lonelier lands than rear the wild white rose
That each year sees requickened, but for us
Time once and twice hath here or there done thus

THE SAILING OF THE SWAN

And left the next year following empty and bare?
What rose hath our last year's rose left for heir,
What wine our last year's vintage? and to me
More were one fleet forbidden sense of thee,
One perfume of thy present grace, one thought
Made truth one hour, ere all mine hours be nought,
One very word, breath, look, sign, touch of hand,
Than all the green leaves in Broceliande
Full of sweet sound, full of sweet wind and sun;
O God, thou knowest I would no more but one,
I would no more but once more ere I die
Find thus much mercy. Nay, but then were I
Happier than he whom there thy grace hath found,
For thine it must be, this that wraps him round,
Thine only, albeit a fiend's force gave him birth,
Thine that has given him heritage on earth
Of slumber-sweet eternity to keep
Fast in soft hold of everliving sleep.
Happier were I, more sinful man, than he,
Whom one love-worthier then than Nimue
Should with a breath make blest among the dead."

And the wan wedded maiden answering said,
Soft as hate speaks within itself apart:
"Surely ye shall not, ye that rent mine heart,
Being one in sin, in punishment be twain."

And the great knight that heard not spake again
And sighed, but sweet thought of sweet things gone
by

Kindled with fire of joy the very sigh
And touched it through with rapture: "Ay, this
were

How much more than the sun and sunbright air,

THE SAILING OF THE SWAN

How much more than the springtide, how much
more

Than sweet strong sea-wind quickening wave and
shore

With one divine pulse of continuous breath,
If she might kiss me with the kiss of death,
And make the light of life by death's look dim!"

And the white wedded virgin answered him,
Inwardly, wan with hurt no herb makes whole:
"Yea surely, ye whose sin hath slain my soul,
Surely your own souls shall have peace in death
And pass with benediction in their breath
And blessing given of mine their sin hath slain."

And Tristram with sore yearning spake again,
Saying: "Yea, might this thing once be, how should I,
With all my soul made one thanksgiving, die,
And pass before what judgment-seat may be,
And cry, 'Lord, now do all thou wilt with me,
Take all thy fill of justice, work thy will;
Though all thy heart of wrath have all its fill,
My heart of suffering shall endure, and say,
For that thou gavest me living yesterday
I bless thee though thou curse me.' Ay, and well
Might one cast down into the gulf of hell,
Remembering this, take heart and thank his fate—
That God, whose doom now scourges him with hate,
Once, in the wild and whirling world above,
Bade mercy kiss his dying lips with love.
But if this come not, then he doth me wrong.
For what hath love done, all this long life long
That death should trample down his poor last prayer
Who prays not for forgiveness? Though love were

THE SAILING OF THE SWAN

Sin dark as hate, have we not here that sinned
Suffered? has that been less than wintry wind
Wherewith our love lies blasted? O mine own,
O mine and no man's yet save mine alone,
Iseult! what ails thee that I lack so long
All of thee, all things thine for which I long?
For more than watersprings to shadeless sands,
More to me were the comfort of her hands
Touched once, and more than rays that set and
rise

The glittering arrows of her glorious eyes,
More to my sense than fire to dead cold air
The wind and light and odour of her hair,
More to my soul than summer's to the south
The mute clear music of her amorous mouth,
And to my heart's heart more than heaven's great
rest

The fullness of the fragrance of her breast.
Iseult, Iseult, what grace hath life to give
More than we twain have had of life, and live?
Iseult, Iseult, what grace may death not keep
As sweet for us to win of death, and sleep?
Come therefore, let us twain pass hence and try
If it be better not to live but die,
With love for lamp to light us out of life."

And on that word his wedded maiden wife,
Pale as the moon in star-forsaken skies
Ere the sun fill them, rose with set strange eyes
And gazed on him that saw not: and her heart
Heaved as a man's death-smitten with a dart
That smites him sleeping, warm and full of life:
So toward her lord that was not looked his wife,

THE SAILING OF THE SWAN

His wife that was not: and her heart within
Burnt bitter like an aftertaste of sin
To one whose memory drinks and loathes the lee
Of shame or sorrow deeper than the sea:
And no fear touched him of her eyes above
And ears that hoarded each poor word whence love
Made sweet the broken music of his breath.
"Iseult, my life that wast and art my death,
My life in life that hast been, and that art
Death in my death, sole wound that cleaves mine
heart,

Mine heart that else, how spent soe'er, were whole,
Breath of my spirit and anguish of my soul,
How can this be that hence thou canst not hear,
Being but by space divided? One is here,
But one of twain I looked at once to see;
Shall death keep time and thou not keep with me?"

And the white married maiden laughed at heart,
Hearing, and scarce with lips at all apart
Spake, and as fire between them was her breath;
"Yea, now thou liest not: yea, for I am death."

By this might eyes that watched without behold
Deep in the gulfs of aching air acold
The roses of the dawning heaven that strew
The low soft sun's way ere his power shine through
And burn them up with fire: but far to west
Had sunk the dead moon on the live sea's breast,
Slain as with bitter fear to see the sun:
And eastward was a strong bright wind begun
Between the clouds and waters: and he said,
Seeing hardly through dark dawn her doubtful
head,

THE SAILING OF THE SWAN

"Iseult?" and like a death-bell faint and clear
The virgin voice rang answer—"I am here."
And his heart sprang, and sank again: and she
Spake, saying, "What would my knightly lord with
me?"

And Tristram: "Hath my lady watched all night
Beside me, and I knew not? God requite
Her love for comfort shown a man nigh dead."

"Yea, God shall surely guerdon it," she said,
"Who hath kept me all my days through to this
hour."

And Tristram: "God alone hath grace and power
To pay such grace toward one unworthier shown
Than ever durst, save only of God alone,
Crave pardon yet and comfort, as I would
Crave now for charity if my heart were good,
But as a coward's it fails me, even for shame."

Then seemed her face a pale funereal flame
That burns down slow by midnight, as she said:
"Speak, and albeit thy bidding spake me dead,
God's love renounce me if it were not done."

And Tristram: "When the sea-line takes the sun
That now should be not far off sight from far,
Look if there come not with the morning star
My ship bound hither from the northward back,
And if the sail be white thereof or black."

And knowing the soothfast sense of his desire
So sore the heart within her raged like fire
She could not wring forth of her lips a word,
But bowing made sign how humbly had she heard.
And the sign given made light his heart; and she
Set her face hard against the yearning sea

THE SAILING OF THE SWAN

Now all athirst with trembling trust of hope
To see the sudden gates of sunrise ope;
But thirstier yearned the heart whose fiery gate
Lay wide that vengeance might come in to hate.
And Tristram lay at thankful rest, and thought
Now surely life nor death could grieve him aught,
Since past was now life's anguish as a breath,
And surely past the bitterness of death.
For seeing he had found at these her hands this grace,
It could not be but yet some breathing-space
Might leave him life to look again on love's own face.
"Since if for death's sake," in his heart he said,
"Even she take pity upon me quick or dead,
How shall not even from God's hand be compassion
shed?"

For night bears dawn, how weak soe'er and wan,
And sweet ere death, men fable, sings the swan.
So seems the Swan my signal from the sea
To sound a song that sweetens death to me
Clasped round about with radiance from above
Of dawn, and closer clasped on earth by love.
Shall all things brighten, and this my sign be dark?"

And high from heaven suddenly rang the lark,
Triumphant; and the far first refluent ray
Filled all the hollow darkness full with day.
And on the deep sky's verge a fluctuant light
Gleamed, grew, shone, strengthened into perfect
sight,
As bowed and dipped and rose again the sail's clear
white.

And swift and steadfast as a sea-mew's wing
It neared before the wind, as fain to bring

THE SAILING OF THE SWAN

Comfort, and shorten yet its narrowing track.
And she that saw looked hardly toward him back,
Saying, "Ay, the ship comes surely; but her sail is
black."

And fain he would have sprung upright, and seen,
And spoken: but strong death struck sheer between,
And darkness closed as iron round his head:
And smitten through the heart lay Tristram dead.

And scarce the word had flown abroad, and wail
Risen, ere to shoreward came the snowbright sail,
And lightly forth leapt Ganhardine on land,
And led from ship with swift and reverent hand
Iseult: and round them up from all the crowd
Broke the great wail for Tristram out aloud.
And ere her ear might hear her heart had heard,
Nor sought she sign for witness of the word;
But came and stood above him newly dead,
And felt his death upon her: and her head
Bowed, as to reach the spring' that slakes all
drouth;
And their four lips became one silent mouth.

So came their hour on them that were in life
Tristram and Iseult: so from love and strife
The stroke of love's own hand felt last and best
Gave them deliverance to perpetual rest.
So, crownless of the wreaths that life had wound,
They slept, with flower of tenderer comfort crowned;
From bondage and the fear of time set free,
And all the yoke of space on earth and sea

THE SAILING OF THE SWAN

Cast as a curb for ever: nor might now
Fear and desire bid soar their souls or bow,
Lift up their hearts or break them: doubt nor grief
More now might move them, dread nor disbelief
Touch them with shadowy cold or fiery sting,
Nor sleepless languor with its weary wing,
Nor harsh estrangement, born of time's vain breath,
Nor change, a darkness deeper far than death.
And round the sleep that fell around them then
Earth lies not wrapped, nor records wrought of
men

Rise up for timeless token: but their sleep
Hath round it like a raiment all the deep;
No change or gleam or gloom of sun and rain,
But all time long the might of all the main
Spread round them as round earth soft heaven is
spread,

And peace more strong than death round all the
dead.

For death is of an hour, and after death
Peace: nor for aught that fear or fancy saith,
Nor even for very love's own sake, shall strife
Perplex again that perfect peace with life.
And if, as men that mourn may deem or dream,
Rest haply here than there might sweeter seem,
And sleep, that lays one hand on all, more good
By some sweet grave's grace given of wold or wood
Or clear high glen or sunbright wind-worn down
Than where life thunders through the trampling
town

With daylong feet and nightlong overhead,
What grave may cast such grace round any dead,

THE SAILING OF THE SWAN

What so sublime sweet sepulchre may be
For all that life leaves mortal, as the sea?
And these, rapt forth perforce from earthly ground,
These twain the deep sea guards, and girdles round
Their sleep more deep than any sea's gulf lies,
Though changeless with the change in shifting skies,
Nor mutable with seasons: for the grave
That held them once, being weaker than a wave,
The waves long since have buried: though their tomb
Was royal that by ruth's relenting doom
Men gave them in Tintagel: for the word
Took wing which thrilled all piteous hearts that
 heard
The word wherethrough their lifelong lot stood
 shown,
And when the long sealed springs of fate were
 known,
The blind bright innocence of lips that quaffed
Love, and the marvel of the mastering draught,
And all the fraughtage of the fateful bark,
Loud like a child upon them wept King Mark,
Seeing round the sword's hilt which long since had
 fought
For Cornwall's love a scroll of writing wrought,
A scripture writ of Tristram's hand, wherein
Lay bare the sinless source of all their sin,
No choice of will, but chance and sorcerous art,
With prayer of him for pardon: and his heart
Was molten in him, wailing as he kissed
Each with the kiss of kinship—"Had I wist,
Ye had never sinned nor died thus, nor had I
Borne in this doom that bade you sin and die

THE SAILING OF THE SWAN

So sore a part of sorrow." And the king
Built for their tomb a chapel bright like spring
With flower-soft wealth of branching tracery made
Fair as the frondage each fleet year sees fade,
That should not fall till many a year were done.
There slept they wedded under moon and sun
And change of stars: and through the casements
came
Midnight and noon girt round with shadow and
flame
To illume their grave or veil it: till at last
On these things too was doom as darkness cast:
For the strong sea hath swallowed wall and tower,
And where their limbs were laid in woful hour
For many a fathom gleams and moves and moans
The tide that sweeps above their coffined bones
In the wrecked chancel by the shivered shrine:
Nor where they sleep shall moon or sunlight shine
Nor man look down for ever: none shall say,
Here once, or here, Tristram and Iseult lay:
But peace they have that none may gain who live,
And rest about them that no love can give,
And over them, while death and life shall be,
The light and sound and darkness of the sea.

THE TALE OF BALEN

DEDICATION

TO MY MOTHER

Love that holds life and death in fee,
Deep as the clear unsounded sea
And sweet as life or death can be,
Lays here my hope, my heart, and me

Before you, silent, in a song.

Since the old wild tale, made new, found grace,
When half sung through, before your face,
It needs must live a springtide space,

While April suns grow strong.

March 24, 1896.

In hawthorn-time the heart grows light,
 The world is sweet in sound and sight,
 Glad thoughts and birds take flower and flight,
 The heather kindles toward the light,
 The whin is frankincense and flame.
 And be it for strife or be it for love
 The falcon quickens as the dove
 When earth is touched from heaven above
 With joy that knows no name.

And glad in spirit and sad in soul
 With dream and doubt of days that roll
 As waves that race and find no goal
 Rode on by bush and brake and bole
 A northern child of earth and sea.
 The pride of life before him lay
 Radiant: the heavens of night and day
 Shone less than shone before his way
 His ways and days to be.

And all his life of blood and breath
 Sang out within him: time and death
 Were even as words a dreamer saith
 When sleep within him slackeneth,
 And light and life and spring were one.

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THE TALE OF BALEN

The steed between his knees that sprang,
The moors and woods that shone and sang,
The hours where through the spring's breath rang,
Seemed ageless as the sun.

But alway through the bounteous bloom
That earth gives thanks if heaven illumine
His soul forefelt a shadow of doom,
His heart foreknew a gloomier gloom
Than closes all men's equal ways.
Albeit the spirit of life's light spring
With pride of heart upheld him, king
And lord of hours like snakes that sting
And nights that darken days.

And as the strong spring round him grew
Stronger, and all blithe winds that blew
Blither, and flowers that flowered anew
More glad of sun and air and dew,
The shadow lightened on his soul
And brightened into death and died
Like winter, as the bloom waxed wide
From woodside on to riverside
And southward goal to goal.

Along the wandering ways of Tyne,
By beech and birch and thorn that shine
And laugh when life's requickening wine
Makes night and noon and dawn divine
And stirs in all the veins of spring,

THE TALE OF BALEN

And past the brightening banks of Tees,
He rode as one that breathes and sees
A sun more blithe, a merrier breeze,
 A life that hails him king.

And down the softening south that knows
No more how glad the heather glows,
Nor how, when winter's clarion blows
Across the bright Northumbrian snows,
 Sea-mists from east and westward meet,
Past Avon senseless yet of song
And Thames that bore but swans in throng
He rode elate in heart and strong
 In trust of days as sweet.

So came he through to Camelot,
Glad, though for shame his heart waxed hot,
For hope within it withered not
To see the shaft it dreamed of shot
 Fair toward the glimmering goal of fame.
And all King Arthur's knightliest there
Approved him knightly, swift to dare
And keen to bid their records bear
 Sir Balen's northern name.

Sir Balen of Northumberland
Gat grace before the king to stand
High as his heart was, and his hand
Wrought honour toward the strange north strand
 That sent him south so goodly a knight.

THE TALE OF BALEN

And envy, sick with sense of sin,
Began as poisonous herbs begin
To work in base men's blood, akin
 To men's of nobler might.

And even so fell it that his doom,
For all his bright life's kindling bloom
And light that took no thought for gloom,
Fell as a breath from the opening tomb
 Full on him ere he wist or thought.
For once a churl of royal seed,
King Arthur's kinsman, faint in deed
And loud in word that knew not heed,
 Spake shame where shame was nought.

"What doth one here in Camelot
Whose birth was northward? Wot we not
As all his brethren borderers wot
How blind of heart, how keen and hot,
 The wild north lives and hates the south?
Men of the narrowing march that knows
Nought save the strength of storms and snows,
What would these carles where knighthood blows
 A trump of kinglike mouth?"

Swift from his place leapt Balen, smote
The liar across his face, and wrote
His wrath in blood upon the bloat
Brute cheek that challenged shame for note
 How vile a king-born knave might be.

THE TALE OF BALEN

Forth sprang their swords, and Balen slew
The knave ere well one witness knew
Of all that round them stood or drew
 What sight was there to see.

Then spake the great king's wrathful will
A doom for six dark months to fill
Wherein close prison held him, still
And steadfast-souled for good or ill.

 But when those weary days lay dead
His lordliest knights and barons spake
Before the king for Balen's sake
Good speech and wise, of force to break
 The bonds that bowed his head.

IN linden-time the heart is high
 For pride of summer passing by
 With lordly laughter in her eye;
 A heavy splendour in the sky

Uplifts and bows it down again.
 The spring had waned from wood and wold
 Since Balen left his prison hold
 And lowlier-hearted than of old
 Beheld it wax and wane.

Though humble heart and poor array
 Kept not from spirit and sense away
 Their noble nature, nor could slay
 The pride they bade but pause and stay
 Till time should bring its trust to flower,
 Yet even for noble shame's sake, born
 Of hope that smiled on hate and scorn,
 He held him still as earth ere morn
 Ring forth her rapturous hour.

But even as earth when dawn takes flight
 And beats her wings of dewy light
 Full in the faltering face of night,
 His soul awoke to claim by right
 The life and death of deed and doom,

THE TALE OF BALEN

When once before the king there came
A maiden clad with grief and shame
And anguish burning her like flame
That feeds on flowers in bloom.

Beneath a royal mantle, fair
With goodly work of lustrous vair,
Girt fast against her side she bare
A sword whose weight bade all men there
Quail to behold her face again.
Save of a passing perfect knight
Not great alone in force and fight
It might not be for any might
Drawn forth, and end her pain.

So said she: then King Arthur spake:
"Albeit indeed I dare not take
Such praise on me, for knighthood's sake
And love of ladies will I make
Assay if better none may be."
By girdle and by sheath he caught
The sheathed and girded sword, and wrought
With strength whose force availed him nought
To save and set her free.

Again she spake: "No need to set
The might that man has matched not yet
Against it; he whose hand shall get
Grace to release the bonds that fret
My bosom and my girdlestead

THE TALE OF BALEN

With little strain or strength or strife
Shall bring me as from death to life
And win to sister or to wife
Fame that outlives men dead."

Then bade the king his knights assay
This mystery that before him lay
And mocked his might of manhood. "Nay,"
Quoth she, "the man that takes away
This burden laid on me must be
A knight of record clean and fair
As sunlight and the flowerful air,
By sire and mother born to bear
A name to shame not me."

Then forth strode Launcelot, and laid
The mighty-moulded hand that made
Strong knights reel back like birds affrayed
By storm that smote them as they strayed
Against the hilt that yielded not.
Then Tristram, bright and sad and kind
As one that bore in noble mind
Love that made light as darkness blind,
Fared even as Launcelot.

Then Lamoracke, with hardier cheer,
As one that held all hope and fear
Wherethrough the spirit of man may steer
In life and death less dark or dear,
Laid hand thereon, and fared as they.

THE TALE OF BALEN

With half a smile his hand he drew
Back from the spell-bound thing, and threw
With half a glance his heart anew
Toward no such blameless may.

Between Iseult and Guenevere
Sat one of name as high to hear,
But darklier doomed than they whose cheer
Foreshowed not yet the deadlier year
That bids the queenliest head bow down,
The queen Morgause of Orkney: they
With scarce a flash of the eye could say
The very word of dawn, when day
Gives earth and heaven their crown.

But bright and dark as night or noon
And lowering as a storm-flushed moon
When clouds and thwarting winds distune
The music of the midnight, soon
To die from darkening star to star
And leave a silence in the skies
That yearns till dawn find voice and rise,
Shone strange as fate Morgause, with eyes
That dwelt on days afar.

A glance that shot on Lamoracke
As from a storm-cloud bright and black
Fire swift and blind as death's own track
Turned fleet as flame on Arthur back
From him whose hand forsook the hilt:

THE TALE OF BALEN

And one in blood and one in sin
Their hearts caught fire of pain within
And knew no goal for them to win
But death that guerdons guilt.

Then Gawain, sweet of soul and gay
As April ere he dreams of May,
Strove, and prevailed not; then Sir Kay,
The snake-souled envier, vile as they
That fawn and foam and lurk and lie,
Sire of the bastard band whose brood
Was alway found at servile feud
With honour, faint and false and lewd,
Scarce grasped and put it by.

Then wept for woe the damsel bound
With iron and with anguish round,
That none to help her grief was found
Or loose the inextricably inwound
Grim curse that girt her life with grief
And made a burden of her breath,
Harsh as the bitterness of death.
Then spake the king as one that saith
Words bitterer even than brief.

"Methought the wide round world could bring
Before the face of queen or king
No knights more fit for fame to sing
Than fill this full Round Table's ring
With honour higher than pride of place:

THE TALE OF BALEN

But now my heart is wrung to know,
Damsel, that none whom fame can show
Finds grace to heal or help thy woe:
God gives them not the grace."

Then from the lowliest place thereby,
With heart-enkindled cheek and eye
Most like the star and kindling sky
That say the sundawn's hour is high
When rapture trembles through the sea,
Strode Balen in his poor array
Forth, and took heart of grace to pray
The damsel suffer even him to assay
His power to set her free.

Nay, how should he avail, she said,
Averse with scorn-averted head,
Where these availed not? none had sped
Of all these mightier men that led
The lists wherein he might not ride,
And how should less men speed? But he,
With lordlier pride of courtesy,
Put forth his hand and set her free
From pain and humbled pride.

But 'on the sword he gazed elate
With hope set higher than fear or fate,
Or doubt of darkling days in wait;
And when her thankful praise waxed great
And craved of him the sword again,

THE TALE OF BALEN

He would not give it. "Nay, for mine
It is till force may make it thine."
A smile that shone as death may shine
Spake toward him bale and bane.

Strange lightning flickered from her eyes.
"Gentle and good in knightliest guise
And meet for quest of strange emprise
Thou hast here approved thee: yet not wise
To keep the sword from me, I wis.
For with it thou shalt surely slay
Of all that look upon the day
The man best loved of thee, and lay
Thine own life down for his."

"What chance God sends, that chance I take,"
He said. Then soft and still she spake;
"I would but for thine only sake
Have back the sword of thee, and break
The links of doom that bind thee round.
But seeing thou wilt not have it so,
My heart for thine is wrung with woe."
"God's will," quoth he, "it is, we know,
Wherewith our lives are bound."

"Repent it must thou soon," she said,
"Who wouldst not hear the rede I read
For thine and not for my sake, sped
In vain as waters heavenward shed
From springs that falter and depart

THE TALE OF BALEN

Earthward. God bids not thee believe
Truth, and the web thy life must weave
For even this sword to close and cleave
Hangs heavy round my heart."

So passed she mourning forth. But he,
With heart of springing hope set free
As birds that breast and brave the sea,
Bade horse and arms and armour be
Made straightway ready toward the fray.
Nor even might Arthur's royal prayer
Withhold him, but with frank and fair
Thanksgiving and leave-taking there
He turned him thence away.

III

As the east wind, when the morning's breast
Gleams like a bird's that leaves the nest,
A fledgeling halcyon's bound on quest,
Drives wave on wave on wave to west
 Till all the sea be life and light,
So time's mute breath, that brings to bloom
All flowers that strew the dead spring's tomb,
Drives day on day on day to doom
 Till all man's day be night.

Brief as the breaking of a wave
That hurls on man his thunderous grave
Ere fear find breath to cry or crave
Life that no chance may spare or save,
 The light of joy and glory shone
Even as in dreams were death seems dead
Round Balen's hope-exalted head,
Shone, passed, and lightened as it fled
 The shadow of doom thereon.

For as he bound him thence to fare,
Before the stately presence there
A lady like a windflower fair,
Girt on with raiment strange and rare
 That rippled whispering round her, came.

THE TALE OF BALEN

Her clear cold eyes, all glassy grey,
Seemed lit not with the light of day
But touched with gleams that waned away
Of quelled and fading flame.

Before the king she bowed and spake:
"King, for thine old faith's plighted sake
To me the lady of the lake,
I come in trust of thee to take
The guerdon of the gift I gave,
Thy sword Excalibur." And he
Made answer: "Be it whate'er it be,
If mine to give, I give it thee,
Nor need is thine to crave."

As when a gleam of wicked light
Turns half a low-lying water bright
That moans beneath the shivering night
With sense of evil sound and sight
And whispering witchcraft's bated breath,
Her wan face quickened as she said:
"This knight that won the sword—his head
I crave or hers that brought it. Dead,
Let these be one in death."

"Not with mine honour this may be;
Ask all save this thou wilt," quoth he,
"And have thy full desire." But she
Made answer: "Nought will I of thee,
Nought if not this." Then Balen turned,

THE TALE OF BALEN

And saw the sorceress hard beside
By whose fell craft his mother died:
Three years he had sought her, and here espied
His heart against her yearned.

"Ill be thou met," he said, "whose ire
Would slake with blood thy soul's desire:
By thee my mother died in fire;
Die thou by me a death less dire."

Sharp flashed his sword forth, fleet as flame,
And shore away her sorcerous head.
"Alas for shame," the high king said,
"That one found once my friend lies dead;
Alas for all our shame!

"Thou shouldst have here forborne her; yea,
Were all the wrongs that bid men slay
Thine, heaped too high for wrath to weigh,
Not here before my face to-day
Was thine the right to wreak thy wrong."
Still stood he then as one that found
His rose of hope by storm discrowned,
And all the joy that girt him round
Brief as a broken song.

Yet ere he passed he turned and spake:
"King, only for thy nobler sake
Than aught of power man's power may take
Or pride of place that pride may break
I bid the lordlier man in thee,

THE TALE OF BALEN

That lives within the king, give ear.
This justice done before thee here
On one that hell's own heart holds dear,
Needs might not this but be.

"Albeit, for all that pride would prove,
My heart be wrung to lose thy love,
It yet repents me not hereof:
So many an eagle and many a dove,
So many a knight, so many a may,
This water-snake of poisonous tongue
To death by words and wiles hath stung,
That her their slayer, from hell's lake sprung,
I did not ill to slay."

"Yea," said the king, "too high of heart
To stand before a king thou art;
Yet irks it me to bid thee part
And take thy penance for thy part,
That God may put upon thy pride."
Then Balen took the severed head
And toward his hostry turned and sped
As one that knew not quick from dead
Nor good from evil tide.

He bade his squire before him stand
And take that sanguine spoil in hand
And bear it far by shore and strand
Till all in glad Northumberland
That loved him, seeing it, all might know

THE TALE OF BALEN

His deadliest foe was dead, and hear
How free from prison as from fear
He dwelt in trust of the answering year
 To bring him weal for woe.

“And tell them, now I take my way
To meet in battle, if I may,
King Ryons of North Wales, and slay
That king of kernes whose fiery sway
 Doth all the marches dire despite
That serve King Arthur: so shall he
Again be gracious lord to me,
And I that leave thee meet with thee
 Once more in Arthur’s sight.”

So spake he ere they parted, nor
Took shame or fear to counsellor,
As one whom none laid ambush for;
And wist not how Sir Launceor,
 The wild king’s son of Ireland, hot
And high in wrath to know that one
Stood higher in fame before the sun,
Even Balen, since the sword was won,
 Drew nigh from Camelot.

For thence, in heat of hate and pride,
As one that man might bid not bide,
He craved the high king’s grace to ride
On quest of Balen far and wide
 And wreak the wrong his wrath had wrought,

THE TALE OF BALEN

"Yea," Arthur said, "for such despite
Was done me never in my sight
As this thine hand shall now requite
If trust avail us aught."

But ere he passed, in eager mood
To feed his hate with bitter food,
Before the king's face Merlin stood
And heard his tale of ill and good,
Of Balen, and the sword achieved,
And whence it smote as heaven's red ire
That direful dame of doom as dire;
And how the king's wrath turned to fire
The grief wherewith he grieved.

And darkening as he gave it ear,
The still face of the sacred seer
Waxed wan with wrath and not with fear,
And ever changed its cloudier cheer
Till all his face was very night.
"This damosel that brought the sword,"
He said, "before the king my lord,
And all these knights about his board,
Hath done them all despite.

"The falsest damosel she is
That works men ill on earth, I wis,
And all her mind is toward but this,
To kill as with a lying kiss
Truth, and the life of noble trust.

THE TALE OF BALEN

A brother hath she,—see but now
The flame of shame that brands her brow!—
A true man, pure as faith's own vow,
Whose honour knows not rust.

“This good knight found within her bower
A felon and her paramour,
And slew him in his shameful hour,
As right gave might and righteous power
To hands that wreaked so foul a wrong.
Then, for the hate her heart put on,
She sought by ways where death had gone
The lady Lyle of Avalon,
Whose crafts are strange and strong.

“The sorceress, one with her in thought,
Gave her that sword of magic, wrought
By charms whereof sweet heaven sees nought,
That hither girt on her she brought
To be by doom her brother's bane.
And grief it is to think how he
That won it, being of heart so free
And perfect found in chivalry,
Shall by that sword lie slain.

“Great pity it is and strange despite
That one whose eyes are stars to light
Honour, and shine as heaven's own height,
Should perish, being the goodliest knight
That even the all-glorious north has borne.

THE TALE OF BALEN

Nor shall my lord the king behold
A lordlier friend of mightier mould
Than Balen, though his tale be told
Ere noon fulfil his morn."

IV

As morning hears before it run
The music of the mounting sun,
And laughs to watch his trophies won
From darkness, and her hosts undone,
 And all the night become a breath,
Nor dreams that fear should hear and flee
The summer menace of the sea,
So hears our hope what life may be,
 And knows it not for death.

Each day that slays its hours and dies
Weeps, laughs, and lightens on our eyes,
And sees and hears not: smiles and sighs
As flowers ephemeral fall and rise
 About its birth, about its way,
And pass as love and sorrow pass,
As shadows flashing down a glass,
As dew-flowers blowing in flowerless grass,
 As hope from yesterday.

The blossom of the sunny dew
That now the stronger sun strikes through
Fades off the blade whereon it blew
No fleetlier than the flowers that grew
 On hope's green stem in life's fierce light.

THE TALE OF BALEN

Nor might the glory soon to sit
Awhile on Balen's crest alit
Outshine the shadow of doom on it
Or stay death's wings from flight.

Dawn on a golden moorland side
By holt and heath saw Balen ride
And Launceor after, pricked with pride
And stung with spurring envy: wide
And far he had ridden athwart strange lands
And sought amiss the man he found
And cried on, till the stormy sound
Rang as a rallying trumpet round
That fires men's hearts and hands.

Abide he bade him: nor was need
To bid when Balen wheeled his steed
Fiercely, less fain by word than deed
To bid his envier evil speed,
And cried, "What wilt thou with me?" Loud
Rang Launceor's vehement answer: "Knight,
To avenge on thee the dire despite
Thou hast done us all in Arthur's sight
I stand toward Arthur vowed."

"Ay?"[†] Balen said: "albeit I see
I needs must deal in strife with thee,
Light is the wyte thou layest on me;
For her I slew and sinned not, she
Was dire in all men's eyes as death,

THE TALE OF BALEN

Or none were lother found than I
By me to bid a woman die:
As lief were loyal men to lie,
Or scorn what honour saith."

As the arched wave's weight against the reef
Hurls, and is hurled back like a leaf
Storm-shrivelled, and its rage of grief
Speaks all the loud broad sea in brief
And quells the hearkening hearts of men,
Or as the crash of overfalls
Down under blue smooth water brawls
Like jarring steel on ruining walls,
So rang their meeting then.

As wave on wave shocks, and confounds
The bounding bulk whereon it bounds
And breaks and shattering seaward sounds
As crying of the old sea's wolves and hounds
That moan and ravin and rage and wail,
So steed on steed encountering sheer
Shocked, and the strength of Launceor's spear
Shivered on Balen's shield, and fear
Bade hope within him quail.

But Balen's spear through Launceor's shield
Clove as a ploughshare cleaves the field
And pierced the hauberk triple-steeled,
That horse with horseman stricken reeled,
And as a storm-breached rock falls, fell.

THE TALE OF BALEN

And Balen turned his horse again
And wist not yet his foe lay slain,
And saw him dead that sought his bane
And wrought and fared not well.

Suddenly, while he gazed and stood,
And mused in many-minded mood
If life or death were evil or good,
Forth of a covert of a wood
That skirted half the moorland lea
Fast rode a maiden flower-like white
Full toward that fair wild place of fight,
Anhungered of the woful sight
God gave her there to see.

And seeing the man there fallen and dead,
She cried against the sun that shed
Light on the living world, and said,
"O Balen, slayer whose hand is red,
Two bodies and one heart thou hast slain,
Two hearts within one body: aye,
Two souls thou hast lost; by thee they die,
Cast out of sight of earth and sky
And all that made them fain."

And from the dead his sword she caught,
And fell in trance that wist of nought,
Swooning: but softly Balen sought
To win from her the sword she thought
To die on, dying by Launceor's side.

THE TALE OF BALEN

Again her wakening wail outbroke
As wildly, sword in hand, she woke
And struck one swift and bitter stroke
That healed her, and she died.

And sorrowing for their strange love's sake
Rode Balen forth by lawn and lake,
By moor and moss and briar and brake,
And in his heart their sorrow spake
Whose lips were dumb as death, and said
Mute words of presage blind and vain
As rain-stars blurred and marred by rain
To wanderers on a moonless main
Where night and day seem dead.

Then toward a sunbright wildwood side
He looked and saw beneath it ride
A knight whose arms afar espied
By note of name and proof of pride
Bare witness of his brother born,
His brother Balan, hard at hand,
Twin flower of bright Northumberland,
Twin sea-bird of their loud sea-strand,
Twin song-bird of their morn.

Ah then from Balen passed away
All dread of night, all doubt of day,
All care what life or death might say,
All thought of all worse months than May:
Only the might of joy in love

THE TALE OF BALEN

Brake forth within him as a fire,
And deep delight in deep desire
Of far-flown days whose full-souled quire
Rang round from the air above.

From choral earth and quiring air
Rang memories winged like songs that bear
Sweet gifts for spirit and sense to share:
For no man's life knows love more fair
And fruitful of memorial things
Than this the deep dear love that breaks
With sense of life on life, and makes
The sundawn sunnier as it wakes
Where morning round it rings.

"O brother, O my brother!" cried
Each upon each, and cast aside
Their helms unbraced that might not hide
From sight of memory single-eyed
The likeness graven of face and face
And kissed and wept upon each other
For joy and pity of either brother,
And love engrafted by sire and mother,
God's natural gift of grace.

And each with each took counsel meet
For comfort, making sorrow sweet,
And grief a goodly thing to greet:
And word from word leapt light and fleet
Till all the venturous tale was told,

THE TALE OF BALEN

And how in Balen's hope it lay
To meet the wild Welsh king and slay,
And win from Arthur back for pay
The grace he gave of old.

"And thither wilt not thou with me
And win as great a grace for thee?"
"That will I well," quoth Balan: "we
Will cleave together, bound and free,
As brethren should, being twain and one."
But ere they parted thence there came
A creature withered as with flame,
A dwarf mismade in nature's shame,
Between them and the sun.

And riding fleet as fire may glide
He found the dead lie side by side,
And wailed and rent his hair and cried,
"Who hath done this deed?" And Balen eyed
The strange thing loathfully, and said,
"The knight I slew, who found him fain
And keen to slay me: seeing him slain,
The maid I sought to save in vain,
Self stricken, here lies dead.

"Sore grief was mine to see her die,
And for her true faith's sake shall I
Love, and with love of heart more high,
All women better till I die."

"Alas," the dwarf said, "ill for thee

THE TALE OF BALEN

In evil hour this deed was done:
For now the quest shall be begun
Against thee, from the dawning sun
Even to the sunset sea.

"From shore to mountain, dawn to night,
The kinsfolk of this great dead knight
Will chase thee to thy death." A light
Of swift blithe scorn flashed answer bright
As fire from Balen's eye. "For that,
Small fear shall fret my heart," quoth he:
"But that my lord the king should be
For this dead man's sake wroth with me,
Weep might it well thereat."

Then murmuring passed the dwarf away,
And toward the knights in fair array
Came riding eastward up the way
From where the flower-soft lowlands lay
A king whose name the sweet south-west
Held high in honour, and the land
That bowed beneath his gentle hand
Wore on its wild bright northern strand
Tintagel for a crest.

And Balen hailed with homage due
King Mark of Cornwall, when he knew
The pennon that before him flew:
And for those lovers dead and true
The king made moan to hear their doom;

THE TALE OF BALEN

And for their sorrow's sake he sware
To seek in all the marches there
The church that man might find most fair
And build therein their tomb.

As thought from thought takes wing and flies,
 As month on month with sunlit eyes
 Tramples and triumphs in its rise,
 As wave smites wave to death and dies,
 So chance on hurtling chance like steel
 Strikes, flashes, and is quenched, ere fear
 Can whisper hope, or hope can hear,
 If sorrow or joy be far or near
 For time to hurt or heal.

Swift as a shadow and strange as light
 That cleaves in twain the shadow of night
 Before the wide-winged word takes flight
 That thunder speaks to depth and height
 And quells the quiet hour with sound,
 There came before King Mark and stood
 Between the moorside and the wood
 The man whose word God's will made good,
 Nor guile was in it found.

And Merlin said to Balen: "Lo,
 Thou hast wrought thyself a grievous woe
 To let this lady die, and know
 Thou mightst have stayed her deadly blow."
 And Balen answered him and said,

THE TALE OF BALEN

"Nay, by my truth to faith, not I,
So fiercely fain she was to die;
Ere well her sword had flashed on high,
Self-slain she lay there dead."

Again and sadly Merlin spake:
"My heart is wrung for this deed's sake,
To know thee therefore doomed to take
Upon thine hand a curse, and make
 Three kingdoms pine through twelve years'
 change,
In want and woe: for thou shalt smite
The man most noble and truest knight
That looks upon the live world's light
 A dolorous stroke and strange.

"And not till years shall round their goal
May this man's wound thou hast given be whole."
And Balen, stricken through the soul
By dark-winged words of doom and dole,
 Made answer: "If I wist it were
No lie but sooth thou sayest of me,
Then even to make a liar of thee
Would I too slay myself, and see
 How death bids dead men fare."

And Merlin took his leave and passed
And was not: and the shadow as fast
Went with him that his word had cast,
Too fleet for thought thereof to last:
 And there those brethren bade King Mark

THE TALE OF BALEN

Farewell: but fain would Mark have known
The strong knight's name who had overthrown
The pride of Launceor, when it shone
Bright as it now lay dark.

And Balan for his brother spake,
Saying: "Sir, albeit him list not break
The seal of secret time, nor shake
Night off him ere his morning wake,
By these two swords he is girt withal
May men that praise him, knights and lords,
Call him the knight that bears two swords,
And all the praise his fame accords
Make answer when they call."

So parted they toward eventide;
And tender twilight, heavy-eyed,
Saw deep down glimmering woodlands ride
Balen and Balan side by side,
Till where the leaves grew dense and dim
Again they spied from far draw near
The presence of the sacred seer,
But so disguised and strange of cheer
That seeing they knew not him.

1
"Now whither ride ye," Merlin said,
"Through shadows that the sun strikes red,
Ere night be born or day be dead?"
But they, for doubt half touched with dread,
Would say not where their goal might lie.

THE TALE OF BALEN

"And thou," said Balen, "what art thou,
To walk with shrouded eye and brow?"
He said: "Me lists not show thee now
By name what man am I."

"Ill seen is this of thee," said they,
"That thou art true in word and way
Nor fain to fear the face of day,
Who wilt not as a true man say
The name it shames not him to bear."
He answered: "Be it or be it not so,
Yet why ye ride this way I know,
To meet King Ryons as a foe,
And how your hope shall fare."

"Well, if ye hearken toward my rede,
Ill, if ye hear not, shall ye speed."
"Ah, now," they cried, "thou art ours at need:
What Merlin saith we are fain to head."
"Great worship shall ye win," said he,
"And look that ye do knightly now,
For great shall be your need, I trow."
And Balen smiled: "By knighthood's vow,
The best we may will we."

Then Merlin bade them turn and take
Rest, for their good steeds' weary sake,
Between the highway and the brake,
Till starry midnight bade them wake:
Then "Rise," he said, "the king is nigh."

THE TALE OF BALEN

Who hath stolen from all his host away
With threescore horse in armed array,
The goodliest knights that bear his sway
And hold his kingdom high.

“And twenty ride of them before
To bear his errand, ere the door
Turn of the night, sealed fast no more,
And sundawn bid the stars wax hoar;
For by the starshine of to-night
He seeks a leman where she waits
His coming, dark and swift as fate’s,
And hearkens toward the unopening gates
That yield not him to sight.”

Then through the glimmering gloom around
A shadowy sense of light and sound
Made, ere the proof thereof were found,
The brave blithe hearts within them bound,
And “Where,” quoth Balen, “rides the king?”
But softer spake the seer: “Abide,
Till hither toward your spears he ride,
Where all the narrowing woodland side
Grows dense with boughs that cling.”

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There in that straitening way they met
The wild Welsh host against them set,
And smote their strong king down, ere yet
His hurrying horde of spears might get
Fierce vantage of them. Then the fight

THE TALE OF BALEN

Grew great and joyous as it grew,
For left and right those brethren slew,
Till all the lawn waxed red with dew
 More deep than dews of night.

And ere the full fierce tale was read
Full forty lay before them dead,
And fast the hurtling remnant fled
And wist not whither fear had led:
 And toward the king they went again,
And would have slain him: but he bowed
Before them, crying in fear aloud
For grace they gave him, seeing the proud
 Wild king brought lowest of men.

And ere the wildwood leaves were stirred
With song or wing of wakening bird,
In Camelot was Merlin's word
With joy in joyous wonder heard
 That told of Arthur's bitterest foe
Diskingdomed and discomfited.
"By whom?" the high king smiled and said.
He answered: "Ere the dawn wax red,
 To-morrow bids you know.

"Two knights whose heart and hope are one
And fain to win your grace have done
This work whereby if grace be won
Their hearts shall hail the enkindling sun
 With joy more keen and deep than day."

THE TALE OF BALEN

And ere the sundawn drank the dew
Those brethren with their prisoner drew
To the outer guard they gave him to
And passed again away.

And Arthur came as toward his guest
To greet his foe, and bade him rest
As one returned from nobler quest
And welcome from the stormbright west,
But by what chance he fain would hear.
"The chance was hard and strange, sir king,"
Quoth Ryons, bowed in thanksgiving.
"Who won you?" Arthur said: "the thing
Is worth a warrior's ear."

The wild king flushed with pride and shame,
Answering: "I know not either name
Of those that there against us came
And withered all our strength like flame:
The knight that bears two swords is one,
And one his brother: not on earth
May men meet men of knightlier worth
Nor mightier born of mortal birth
That hail the sovereign sun."

And Arthur said: "I know them not;
But much am I for this, God wot,
Beholden to them: Launcelot
Nor Tristram, when the war waxed hot
Along the marches east and west,

THE TALE OF BALEN

Wrought ever nobler work than this."
"Ah," Merlin said, "sore pity it is
And strange mischance of doom, I wis,
That death should mar their quest.

"Balén, the perfect knight that won
The sword whose name is malison,
And made his deed his doom, is one:
Nor hath his brother Balan done
Less royal service: not on earth
Lives there a nobler knight, more strong
Of soul to win men's praise in song,
Albeit the light abide not long
That lightened round his birth.

"Yea, and of all sad things I know
The heaviest and the highest in woe
Is this, the doom whose date brings low
Too soon in timeless overthrow
A head so high, a hope so sure.
The greatest moan for any knight
That ever won fair fame in fight
Shall be for Balén, seeing his might
Must now not long endure."

"Alas," King Arthur said, "he hath shown
Such love to me-ward that the moan
Made of him should be mine alone
Above all other, knowing it known
I have ill deserved it of him." "Nay,"

THE TALE OF BALEN

Said Merlin, "he shall do for you
Much more, when time shall be anew,
Than time hath given him chance to do
Or hope may think to say.

"But now must be your powers purveyed
To meet, ere noon of morn be made
To-morrow, all the host arrayed
Of this wild foe's wild brother, laid
 Around against you: see to it well,
For now I part from you." And soon,
When sundawn slew the withering moon,
Two hosts were met to win the boon
 Whose tale is death's to tell.

A lordly tale of knights and lords
For death to tell by count of swords
When war's wild harp in all its chords
Rang royal triumph, and the hordes
 Of hurtling foemen rocked and reeled
As waves wind-thwarted on the sea,
Was told of all that there might be,
Till scarce might battle hear or see
 The fortune of the field.

!
And many a knight won fame that day
When even the serpent soul of Kay
Was kindled toward the fiery play
As might a lion's be for prey,
 And won him fame that might not die

THE TALE OF BALEN

With passing of his rancorous breath
But clung about his life and death
As fire that speaks in cloud, and saith
What strong men hear and fly.

And glorious works were Arthur's there,
That lit the battle-darkened air:
But when they saw before them fare
Like stars of storm the knight that bare
Two swords about him girt for fray,
Balén, and Balán with him, then
Strong wonder smote the souls of men
If heaven's own host or hell's deep den
Had sent them forth to slay.

So keen they rode across the fight,
So sharp they smote to left and right,
And made of hurtling darkness light
With lightning of their swords, till flight
And fear before them flew like flame,
That Arthur's self had never known,
He said, since first his blast was blown,
Such lords of war as these alone
That whence he knew not came.

But while the fire of war waxed hot
The wild king hearkened, hearing not,
Through storm of spears and arrow-shot,
For succour toward him from King Lot
And all his host of sea-born men,

THE TALE OF BALEN

Strong as the strong storm-baffling bird
Whose cry round Orkney's headlands heard
Is as the sea's own sovereign word
That mocks our mortal ken.

For Merlin's craft of prophecy,
Who wist that one of twain must die
Put might in him to say thereby
Which head should lose its crown, and lie
Stricken, though loth he were to know
That either life should wane and fail;
Yet most might Arthur's love avail,
And still with subtly tempered tale
His wile held fast the foe.

With woven words of magic might
Wherein the subtle shadow and light
Changed hope and fear till fear took flight,
He stayed King Lot's fierce lust of fight
Till all the wild Welsh war was driven
As foam before the wind that wakes
With the all-awakening sun, and breaks
Strong ships that rue the mirth it makes
When grace to slay is given.

!
And ever hotter lit and higher,
As fire that meets encountering fire,
Waxed in King Lot his keen desire
To bid revenge within him tire
On Arthur's ravaged fame and life:

THE TALE OF BALEN

Across the waves of war between
Floated and flashed, unseen and seen,
The lustrous likeness of the queen
Whom shame had sealed his wife.

But when the woful word was brought
That while he tarried, doubting nought,
The hope was lost whose goal he sought
And all the fight he yearned for fought,
His heart was rent for grief and shame,
And half his hope was set on flight
Till word was given him of a knight
Who said: "They are weary and worn with fight,
And we more fresh than flame."

And bright and dark as night and day
Ere either find the unopening way
Clear, and forego the unaltering sway,
The sad king's face shone, frowning: "Yea,
I would that every knight of mine
Would do his part as I shall do,"
He said, "till death or life anew
Shall judge between us as is due
With wiser doom than thine."

Then thundered all the awakening field
With crash of hosts that clashed and reeled,
Banner to banner, shield to shield,
And spear to splintering spear-shaft, steeled
As heart against high heart of man,

THE TALE OF BALEN

As hope against high hope of knight
To pluck the crest and crown of fight
From war's clenched hand by storm's wild light,
For blessing given or ban.

All hearts of hearkening men that heard
The ban twin-born with blessing, stirred
Like springtide waters, knew the word
Whereby the steeds of storm are spurred
With ravenous rapture to destroy,
And laughed for love of battle, pierced
With passion of tempestuous thirst
And hungering hope to assuage it first
With draughts of stormy joy.

But sheer ahead of the iron tide
That rocked and roared from side to side
Rode as the lightning's lord might ride
King Lot, whose heart was set to abide
All peril of the raging hour,
And all his host of warriors born
Where lands by warring seas are worn
Was only by his hands upborne
Who gave them pride and power.

I

But as the sea's hand smites the shore
And shatters all the strengths that bore
The ravage earth may bear no more,
So smote the hand of Pellinore
Charging, a knight of Arthur's chief,

THE TALE OF BALEN

And clove his strong steed's neck in twain,
And smote him sheer through brow and brain,
Falling: and there King Lot lay slain,
And knew not wrath or grief.

And all the host of Orkney fled,
And many a mother's son lay dead:
But when they raised the stricken head
Whence pride and power and shame were fled
And rage and anguish now cast out,
And bore it toward a kingly tomb,
The wife whose love had wrought his doom
Came thither, fair as morning's bloom
And dark as twilight's doubt.

And there her four strong sons and his,
Gawain and Gareth, Gaherys
And Agravain, whose sword's sharp kiss
With sound of hell's own serpent's hiss
Should one day turn her life to death,
Stood mourning with her: but by these
Seeing Mordred as a seer that sees,
Anguish of terror bent her knees
And caught her shuddering breath.

The splendour of her sovereign eyes
Flashed darkness deeper than the skies
Feel or fear when the sunset dies
On his that felt as midnight rise
Their doom upon them, there undone

THE TALE OF BALEN

By faith in fear ere thought could yield
A shadowy sense of days revealed,
The ravin of the final field,
 The terror of their son.

For Arthur's, as they caught the light
That sought and durst not seek his sight,
Darkened, and all his spirit's might
Withered within him even as night
 Withers when sunrise thrills the sea.
But Mordred's lightened as with fire
That smote his mother and his sire
With darkling doom and deep desire
 That bade its darkness be.

And heavier on their hearts the weight
Sank of the fear that brings forth fate,
The bitter doubt whose womb is great
With all the grief and love and hate
 That turn to fire men's days on earth.
And glorious was the funeral made,
And dark the deepening dread that swayed
Their darkening souls whose light grew shade
 With sense of death in birth.

VI

IN autumn, when the wind and sea
Rejoice to live and laugh to be,
And scarce the blast that curbs the tree
And bids before it quail and flee

The fiery foliage, where its brand
Is radiant as the seal of spring,
Sounds less delight, and waves a wing
Less lustrous, life's loud thanksgiving
Puts life in sea and land.

High hope in Balen's heart alight
Laughed, as from all that clamorous fight
He passed and sought not Arthur's sight,
Who fain had found his kingliest knight

And made amend for Balen's wrong.
But Merlin gave his soul to see
Fate, rising as a shoreward sea,
And all the sorrow that should be
Ere hope or fear thought long.

"O where are they whose hands upbore
My battle," Arthur said, "before
The wild Welsh host's wide rage and roar?
Balen and Balan, Pellinore,

Where are they?" Merlin answered him:

THE TALE OF BALEN

"Balén shall be not long away
From sight of you, but night nor day
Shall bring his brother back to say
If life burn bright or dim."

"Now, by my faith," said Arthur then,
"Two marvellous knights are they, whose ken
Toward battle makes the twain as ten,
And Balén most of all born men
 Passeth of prowess all I know
Or ever found or sought to see:
Would God he would abide with me,
To face the times foretold of thee
 And all the latter woe."

For there had Merlin shown the king
The doom that songs unborn should sing,
The gifts that time should rise and bring
Of blithe and bitter days to spring
 As weeds and flowers against the sun.
And on the king for fear's sake fell
Sickness, and sorrow deep as hell,
Nor even might sleep bid fear farewell
 If grace to sleep were won.

↓
Down in a meadow green and still
He bade the folk that wrought his will
Pitch his pavilion, where the chill
Soft night would let not rest fulfil
 His heart wherein dark fears lay deep.

THE TALE OF BALEN

And sharp against his hearing cast
Came a sound as of horsehoofs fast
Passing, that ere their sound were past
Aroused him as from sleep.

And forth he looked along the grass
And saw before his portal pass
A knight that wailed aloud, "Alas
That life should find this dolorous pass
And find no shield from doom and dole!"
And hearing all his moan, "Abide,
Fair sir," the king arose and cried,
"And say what sorrow bids you ride
So sorrowful of soul."

"My hurt may no man heal, God wot,
And help of man may speed me not,"
The sad knight said, "nor change my lot."
And toward the castle of Melyot
Whose towers arose a league away
He passed forth sorrowing: and anon,
Ere well the woful sight were gone,
Came Balen down the meads that shone,
Strong, bright, and brave as day.

And seeing the king there stand, the knight
Drew rein before his face to alight
In reverence made for love's sake bright
With joy that set his face alight
As theirs who see, alive, above,

THE TALE OF BALEN

The sovereign of their souls, whose name
To them is even as love's own flame
To enkindle hope that heeds not fame
And knows no lord but love.

And Arthur smiled on him, and said,
"Right welcome be thou: by my head,
I would not wish me better sped.
For even but now there came and fled
Before me like a cloud that flies
A knight that made most heavy cheer,
I know not wherefore; nor may fear
Or pity give my heart to hear
Or lighten on mine eyes.

"But even for fear's and pity's sake
Fain were I thou shouldst overtake
And fetch again this knight that spake
No word of answering grace to make
Reply to mine that hailed him: thou,
By force or by goodwill, shalt bring
His face before me." "Yea, my king,"
Quoth Balen, "and a greater thing
Were less than is my vow

"I would the task required and heard
Were heavier than your sovereign word
Hath laid on me:" and thence he spurred
Elate at heart as youth, and stirred
With hope as blithe as fires a boy:

THE TALE OF BALEN

And many a mile he rode, and found
Far in a forest's glimmering bound
The man he sought afar around
And seeing took fire for joy.

And with him went a maiden, fair
As flowers aflush with April air.
And Balen bade him turn him there
To tell the king what woes they were
That bowed him down so sore: and he
Made woful answer: "This should do
Great scathe to me, with nought for you
Of help that hope might hearken to
For boot that may not be."

And Balen answered: "I were loth
To fight as one perforce made wroth
With one that owes by knighthood's oath
One love, one service, and one troth
With me to him whose gracious hand
Holds fast the helm of knighthood here
Whereby man's hope and heart may steer:
I pray you let not sorrow or fear
Against his bidding stand."

The strange knight gazed on him, and spake:
"Will you, for Arthur's royal sake,
Be warrant for me that I take
No scathe from strife that man may make?
Then will I go with you." And he

THE TALE OF BALEN

Made joyous answer: "Yea, for I
Will be your warrant or will die."
And thence they rode with hearts as high
As men's that search the sea.

And as by noon's large light the twain
Before the tented hall drew rein,
Suddenly fell the strange knight, slain
By one that came and went again
And none might see him; but his spear
Clove through the body, swift as fire,
The man whose doom, forefelt as dire,
Had darkened all his life's desire,
As one that death held dear.

And dying he turned his face and said,
"Lo now thy warrant that my head
Should fall not, following forth where led
A knight whose pledge hath left me dead.
This darkling manslayer hath to name
Garlon: take thou my goodlier steed,
Seeing thine is less of strength and speed,
And ride, if thou be knight indeed,
Even thither whence we came.

And as the maiden's fair behest
Shall bid you follow on my quest,
Follow: and when God's will sees best,
Revenge my death, and let me rest
As one that lived and died a knight,

THE TALE OF BALEN

Unstained of shame alive or dead."
And Balen, wrung with sorrow, said,
"That shall I do: my hand and head
I pledge to do you right."

And thence with sorrowing heart and cheer
He rode, in grief that cast out fear
Lest death in darkness yet were near,
And bore the truncheon of the spear
 Wherewith the woful knight lay slain
To her with whom he rode, and she
Still bare it with her, fain to see
What righteous doom of God's might be
 The darkling manslayer's bane.

And down a dim deep woodland way
They rode between the boughs asway
With flickering winds whose flash and play
Made sunlight sunnier where the day
 Laughed, leapt, and fluttered like a bird
Caught in a light loose leafy net
That earth for amorous heaven had set
To hold and see the sundawn yet
 And hear what morning heard.

There in the sweet soft shifting light
Across their passage rode a knight
Flushed hot from hunting as from fight,
And seeing the sorrow-stricken sight
 Made question of them why they rode

THE TALE OF BALEN

As mourners sick at heart and sad,
When all alive about them bade
Sweet earth for heaven's sweet sake be glad
As heaven for earth's love glowed.

"Me lists not tell you," Balen said.
The strange knight's face grew keen and red;
"Now, might my hand but keep my head,
Even here should one of twain lie dead
Were he no better armed than I."
And Balen spake with smiling speed,
Where scorn and courtesy kept heed
Of either: "That should little need:
Not here shall either die."

And all the cause he told him through
As one that feared not though he knew
All: and the strange knight spake anew,
Saying: "I will part no more from you
While life shall last me." So they went
Where he might arm himself to ride,
And rode across wild ways and wide
To where against a churchyard side
A hermit's harbour leant.

And there against them riding came
Fleet as the lightning's laugh and flame
The invisible evil, even the same
They sought and might not curse by name
As hell's foul child on earth set free,

THE TALE OF BALEN

And smote the strange knight through, and fled,
And left the mourners by the dead.

"Alas, again," Sir Balen said,

"This wrong he hath done to me."

And there they laid their dead to sleep
Royally, lying where wild winds keep
Keen watch and wail more soft and deep
Than where men's choirs bid music weep
 And song like incense heave and swell.
And forth again they rode, and found
Before them, dire in sight and sound,
A castle girt about and bound
 With sorrow like a spell.

Above it seemed the sun at noon
Sad as a wintry withering moon
That shudders while the waste wind's tune
Craves ever none may guess what boon,
 But all may know the boon for dire.
And evening on its darkness fell
More dark than very death's farewell,
And night about it hung like hell,
 Whose fume the dawn made fire.

And Balen lighted down and passed
Within the gateway, whence no blast
Rang as the sheer portcullis, cast
Suddenly down, fell, and made fast
 The gate behind him, whence he spied

THE TALE OF BALEN

A sudden rage of men without
And ravin of a murderous rout
That girt the maiden hard about
 With death on either side.

And seeing that shame and peril, fear
Bade wrath and grief awake and hear
What shame should say in fame's wide ear
If she, by sorrow sealed more dear
 Than joy might make her, so should die:
And up the tower's curled stair he sprang
As one that flies death's deadliest fang,
And leapt right out amid their gang
 As fire from heaven on high.

And they thereunder seeing the knight
Unhurt among their press alight
And bare his sword for chance of fight
Stood from him, loth to strive or smite,
 And bade him hear their woful word,
That not the maiden's death they sought;
But there through years too dire for thought
Had lain their lady stricken, and nought
 Might heal her: and he heard.

For there a maiden clean and whole
In virgin body and virgin soul,
Whose name was writ on royal roll,
That would but stain a silver bowl
 With offering of her stainless blood,

THE TALE OF BALEN

Therewith might heal her: so they stayed
For hope's sad sake each blameless maid
There journeying in that dolorous shade
Whose bloom was bright in bud.

No hurt nor harm to her it were
If she should yield a sister there
Some tribute of her blood, and fare
Forth with this joy at heart to bear,
That all unhurt and unafraid
This grace she had here by God's grace wrought.
And kindling all with kindly thought
And love that saw save love's self nought,
Shone, smiled, and spake the maid.

"Good knight of mine, good will have I
To help this healing though I die."
"Nay," Balen said, "but love may try
What help in living love may lie.

—I will not lose the life of her
While my life lasteth." So she gave
The tribute love was fain to crave,
But might not heal though fain to save,
Were God's grace helpfuller.

Another maid in later Mays
Won with her life that woful praise,
And died. But they, when surging day's
Deep tide fulfilled the dawn's wide ways,
Rode forth, and found by day or night

THE TALE OF BALEN

No chance to cross their wayfaring
Till when they saw the fourth day spring
A knight's hall gave them harbouring
 Rich as a king's house might.

And while they sat at meat and spake
Words bright and kind as grace might make
Sweet for true knighthood's kindly sake,
They heard a cry beside them break
 The still-souled joy of blameless rest.
"What noise is this?" quoth Balen. "Nay,"
His knightly host made answer, "may
Our grief not grieve you though I say
 How here I dwell unblest.

"Not many a day has lived and died
Since at a tourney late I tried
My strength to smite and turn and ride
Against a knight of kinglike pride,
 King Pellam's brother: twice I smote
The splendour of his strength to dust:
And he, fulfilled of hate's fierce lust,
Swore vengeance, pledged for hell to trust,
 And keen as hell's wide throat.

!
"Invisible as the spirit of night
That heaven and earth in depth and height
May see not by the mild moon's light
Nor even when stars would grant them sight,
 He walks and slays as plague's blind breath

THE TALE OF BALEN

Slays: and my son, whose anguish here
 Makes moan perforce that mars our cheer,
 He wounded, even ere love might fear
 That hate were strong as death.

“Nor may my son be whole till he
 Whose stroke through him hath stricken me
 Shall give again his blood to be
 Our healing: yet may no man see
 This felon, clothed with darkness round
 And keen as lightning’s life.” Thereon
 Spake Balen, and his presence shone
 Even as the sun’s when stars are gone
 That hear dawn’s trumpet sound.

“That knight I know: two knights of mine,
 Two comrades, sealed by faith’s bright sign,
 Whose eyes as ours that live should shine,
 And drink the golden sunlight’s wine
 With joy’s thanksgiving that they live,
 He hath slain in even the same blind wise:
 Were all wide wealth beneath the skies
 Mine, might I meet him, eyes on eyes,
 All would I laugh to give.”

His host made answer, and his gaze
 Grew bright with trust as dawn’s moist maze
 With fire: “Within these twenty days,
 King Pellam, lord of Lystenayse,
 Holds feast through all this country cried,

THE TALE OF BALEN

And there before the knightly king
May no knight come except he bring
For witness of his wayfaring
His paramour or bride.

“And there that day, so soon to shine,
This knight, your felon foe and mine,
Shall show, full-flushed with bloodred wine,
The fierce false face whereon we pine
To wreak the wrong he hath wrought us, bare
As shame should see and brand it.” “Then,”
Said Balen, “shall he give again
His blood to heal your son, and men
Shall see death blind him there.”

“Forth will we fare to-morrow,” said
His host: and forth, as sunrise led,
They rode; and fifteen days were fled
Ere toward their goal their steeds had sped.
And there alighting might they find
For Balen’s host no place to rest,
Who came without a gentler guest
Beside him: and that household’s hest
Bade leave his sword behind.

“Nay,” Balen said, “that do I not:
My country’s custom stands, God wot,
That none whose lot is knighthood’s lot,
To ride where chance as fire is hot
With hope or promise given of fight,

THE TALE OF BALEN

Shall fail to keep, for knighthood's part,
His weapon with him as his heart;
And as I came will I depart,
Or hold herein my right."

Then gat he leave to wear his sword
Beside the strange king's festal board
Where feasted many a knight and lord
In seemliness of fair accord:

And Balen asked of one beside,
"Is there not in this court, if fame
Keep faith, a knight that hath to name
Garlon?" and saying that word of shame,
He scanned that place of pride.

"Yonder he goeth against the light,
He with the face as swart as night,"
Quoth the other: "but he rides to fight
Hid round by charms from all men's sight,
And many a noble knight he hath slain,
Being wrapt in darkness deep as hell
And silence dark as shame." "Ah, well,"
Said Balen, "is that he? the spell
May be the sorcerer's bane."

Then Balen gazed upon him long,
And thought, "If here I wreak my wrong,
Alive I may not scape, so strong
The felon's friends about him throng;
And if I leave him here alive,

THE TALE OF BALEN

This chance perchance may life not give
Again: much evil, if he live,
He needs must do, should fear forgive
 When wrongs bid strike and strive."

And Garlon, seeing how Balen's eye
Dwelt on him as his heart waxed high
With joy in wrath to see him nigh,
Rose wolf-like with a wolfish cry

 And crossed and smote him on the face,
Saying, "Knight, what wouldst thou with me?
Eat,

For shame, and gaze not: eat thy meat:
Do that thou art come for: stands thy seat
 Next ours of royal race?"

Well hast thou said: thy rede rings true;
That which I came for will I do,"
Quoth Balen: forth his fleet sword flew,
And clove the head of Garlon through
 Clean to the shoulders. Then he cried
Loud to his lady, "Give me here
The truncheon of the shameful spear
Wherewith he slew your knight, when fear
 Bade hate in darkness ride."

And gladly, bright with grief made glad,
She gave the truncheon as he bade,
For still she bare it with her, sad
And strong in hopeless hope she had,
 Through all dark days of thwarting fear,

THE TALE OF BALEN

To see if doom should fall aright
And as God's fire-fraught thunder smite
That head, clothed round with hell-faced night,
Bare now before her here.

And Balen smote therewith the dead
Dark felon's body through, and said
Aloud, "With even this truncheon, red
With baser blood than brave men bled
Whom in thy shameful hand it slew,
Thou hast slain a nobler knight, and now
It clings and cleaves thy body: thou
Shalt cleave again no brave man's brow,
Though hell would aid anew."

And toward his host he turned and spake;
"Now for your son's long-suffering sake
Blood ye may fetch enough, and take
Wherewith to heal his hurt, and make
Death warm as life." Then rose a cry
Loud as the wind's when stormy spring
Makes all the woodland rage and ring:
"Thou hast slain my brother," said the king,
"And here with him shalt die."

"Ay?" Balen laughed him answer. "Well,
Do it then thyself." And the answer fell
Fierce as a blast of hate from hell,
"No man of mine that with me dwell
Shall strike at thee but I their lord

THE TALE OF BALEN

For love of this my brother slain."
And Pellam caught and grasped amain
A grim great weapon, fierce and fain
 To feed his hungering sword.

And eagerly he smote, and sped
Not well: for Balen's blade, yet red
With lifeblood of the murderous dead,
Between the swordstroke and his head
 Shone, and the strength of the eager stroke
Shore it in sunder: then the knight,
Naked and weaponless for fight,
Ran seeking him a sword to smite
 As hope within him woke.

And so their flight for deathward fast
From chamber forth to chamber passed
Where lay no weapon, till the last
Whose doors made way for Balen cast
 Upon him as a sudden spell
Wonder that even as lightning leapt
Across his heart and eyes, and swept
As storm across his soul that kept
 Wild watch, and watched not well.

For there the deed he did, being near
Death's danger, breathless as the deer
Driven hard to bay, but void of fear,
Brought sorrow down for many a year
 On many a man in many a land.

THE TALE OF BALEN

All glorious shone that chamber, bright
As burns at sunrise heaven's own height:
With cloth of gold the bed was dight,
That flamed on either hand.

And one he saw within it lie:
A table of all clear gold thereby
Stood stately, fair as morning's eye,
With four strong silver pillars, high
And firm as faith and hope may be:
And on it shone the gift he sought,
A spear most marvellously wrought,
That when his eye and handgrip caught
Small fear at heart had he.

Right on King Pellam then, as fire
Turns when the thwarting winds wax higher,
He turned, and smote him down. So dire
The stroke was, when his heart's desire
Struck, and had all its fill of hate,
That as the king fell swooning down
Fell the walls, rent from base to crown,
Prone as prone seas that break and drown
Ships fraught with doom for freight.

And there for three days' silent space
Balén and Pellam face to face
Lay dead or deathlike, and the place
Was death's blind kingdom, till the grace
That God had given the sacred seer

THE TALE OF BALEN

For counsel or for comfort led
His Merlin thither, and he said,
Standing between the quick and dead,
 "Rise up, and rest not here."

And Balen rose and set his eyes
Against the seer's as one that tries
His heart against the sea's and sky's
And fears not if he lives or dies,
 Saying, "I would have my damosel,
Ere I fare forth, to fare with me."
And sadly Merlin answered, "See
Where now she lies; death knows if she
 Shall now fare ill or well.

"And in this world we meet no more,
Balen." And Balen, sorrowing sore,
Though fearless yet the heart he bore
Beat toward the life that lay before;
 Rode forth through many a wild waste land
Where men cried out against him, mad
With grievous faith in fear that bade
Their wrath make moan for doubt they had
 Lest hell had armed his hand.

For in that chamber's wondrous shrine
Was part of Christ's own blood, the wine
Shed of the true triumphal vine
Whose growth bids earth's deep darkness shine
 As heaven's deep light through the air and sea;

THE TALE OF BALEN

That mystery toward our northern shore
Arimathea Joseph bore
For healing of our sins of yore,
That grace even there might be.

And with that spear there shrined apart
Was Christ's side smitten to the heart.
And fiercer than the lightning's dart
The stroke was, and the deathlike smart
Wherewith, nigh drained of blood and breath,
The king lay stricken as one long dead:
And Joseph's was the blood there shed,
For near akin was he that bled,
Near even as life to death.

And therefore fell on all that land
Sorrow: for still on either hand,
As Balen rode alone and scanned
Bright fields and cities built to stand
Till time should break them, dead men lay;
And loud and long from all their folk
Living, one cry that cursed him broke;
Three countries had his dolorous stroke
Slain, or should surely slay.

VII

IN winter, when the year burns low
 As fire wherein no firebrands glow,
 And winds dishevel as they blow
 The lovely stormy wings of snow,
 The hearts of northern men burn bright
 With joy that mocks the joy of spring
 To hear all heaven's keen clarions ring
 Music that bids the spirit sing
 And day give thanks for night.

Aloud and dark as hell or hate
 Round Balen's head the wind of fate
 Blew storm and cloud from death's wide gate:
 But joy as grief in him was great
 To face God's doom and live or die,
 Sorrowing for ill wrought unaware,
 Rejoicing in desire to dare
 All ill that innocence might bear
 With changeless heart and eye.

Yet passing fain he was when past
 Those lands and woes at length and last.
 Eight times, as thence he fared forth fast
 Dawn rose and even was overcast
 With starry darkness dear as day,

THE TALE OF BALEN

Before his venturous quest might meet
Adventure, seeing within a sweet
Green low-lying forest, hushed in heat,
A tower that barred his way.

Strong summer, dumb with rapture, bound
With golden calm the woodlands round
Wherethrough the knight forth faring found
A knight that on the greenwood ground
Sat mourning: fair he was to see,
And moulded as for love or fight
A maiden's dreams might frame her knight;
But sad in joy's far-flowering sight
As grief's blind thrall might be.

"God save you," Balen softly said,
"What grief bows down your heart and head
Thus, as one sorrowing for his dead?
Tell me, if haply I may stead
In aught your sorrow, that I may."
"Sir knight," that other said, "thy word
Makes my grief heavier that I heard."
And pity and wonder inly stirred
Drew Balen thence away.

And so withdrawn with silent speed
He saw the sad knight's stately steed,
A war-horse meet for warrior's need,
That none who passed might choose but heed,
So strong he stood, so great, so fair,

THE TALE OF BALEN

With eyes afire for flight or fight,
A joy to look on, mild in might,
And swift and keen and kind as light,
And all as clear of care.

And Balen, gazing on him, heard
Again his master's woful word
Sound sorrow through the calm unstirred
By fluttering wind or flickering bird,
Thus: "Ah, fair lady and faithless, why
Break thy pledged faith to meet me? soon
An hour beyond thy trothplight noon
Shall strike my death-bell, and thy boon
Is this, that here I die.

"My curse for all thy gifts may be
Heavier than death or night on thee;
For now this sword thou gavest me
Shall set me from thy bondage free."
And there the man had died self-slain,
But Balen leapt on him and caught
The blind fierce hand that fain had wrought
Self-murder, stung with fire of thought,
As rage makes anguish fain.

Then, mad for thwarted grief, "Let go
My hand," the fool of wrath and woe
Cried, "or I slay thee." Scarce the glow
In Balen's cheek and eye might show,
As dawn shows day while seas lie chill,

THE TALE OF BALEN

He heard, though pity took not heed,
But smiled and spake, "That shall not need:
What man may do to bid you speed
I, so God speed me, will."

And the other craved his name, beguiled
By hope that made his madness mild.
Again Sir Balen spake and smiled:
"My name is Balen, called the Wild
By knight whom kings and courts make tame,
Because I ride alone afar
And follow but my soul for star."
"Ah, sir, I know the knight you are
And all your fiery fame.

"The knight that bears two swords I know,
Most praised of all men, friend and foe,
For prowess of your hands, that show
Dark war the way where balefires glow
And kindle glory like the dawn's."
So spake the sorrowing knight, and stood
As one whose heart fresh hope made good:
And forth they rode by wold and wood
And down the glimmering lawns.

And Balen craved his name who rode
Beside him, where the wild wood glowed
With joy to feel how noontide flowed
Through glade and glen and rough green road
Till earth grew joyful as the sea.

THE TALE OF BALEN

"My name is Garnysshe of the Mount,
A poor man's son of none account,"
He said, "where springs of loftier fount
Laugh loud with pride to be.

"But strength in weakness lives and stands
As rocks that rise through shifting sands;
And for the prowess of my hands
One made me knight and gave me lands,
Duke Hermel, lord from far to near,
Our prince; and she that loved me—she
I love, and deemed she loved but me,
His daughter, pledged her faith to be
Ere now beside me here."

And Balen, brief of speech as light
Whose word, beheld of depth and height,
Strikes silence through the stars of night,
Spake, and his face as dawn's grew bright,
For hope to help a happier man,
"How far then lies she hence?" "By this,"
Her lover sighed and said, "I wis,
Not six fleet miles the passage is,
And straight as thought could span."

So¹ rode they swift and sure, and found
A castle walled and dyked around:
And Balen, as a warrior bound
On search where hope might fear to sound
The darkness of the deeps of doubt,

THE TALE OF BALEN

Made entrance through the guardless gate
As life, while hope in life grows great,
Makes way between the doors of fate
That death may pass thereout.

Through many a glorious chamber, wrought
For all delight that love's own thought
Might dream or dwell in, Balen sought
And found of all he looked for nought,
For like a shining shell her bed
Shone void and vacant of her: thence
Through devious wonders bright and dense
He passed and saw with shame-struck sense
Where shame and faith lay dead.

Down in a sweet small garden, fair
With flowerful joy in the ardent air,
He saw, and raged with loathing, where
She lay with love-dishevelled hair
Beneath a broad bright laurel tree
And clasped in amorous arms a knight,
The unloveliest that his scornful sight
Had dwelt on yet; a shame the bright
Broad noon might shrink to see.

And thence in wrathful hope he turned,
Hot as the heart within him burned,
To meet the knight whose love, so spurned
And spat on and made nought of, yearned
And dreamed and hoped and lived in vain,

THE TALE OF BALEN

And said, "I have found her sleeping fast,"
And led him where the shadows cast
From leaves wherethrough light winds ran past
Screened her from sun and rain.

But Garnysshe, seeing, reeled as he stood
Like a tree, kingliest of the wood,
Half hewn through: and the burning blood
Through lips and nostrils burst aflood:

And gathering back his rage and might
As broken breakers rally and roar
The loud wind down that drives off shore,
He smote their heads off: there no more
Their life might shame the light.

Then turned he back toward Balen, mad
With grief, and said, "The grief I had
Was nought: ere this my life was glad:
Thou hast done this deed: I was but sad

And fearful how my hope might fare:
I had lived my sorrow down, hadst thou
Not shown me what I saw but now."
The sorrow and scorn on Balen's brow
Bade silence curb him there.

And Balen answered: "What I did
I did to hearten thee and bid
Thy courage know that shame should rid
A man's high heart of love that hid
Blind shame within its core; God knows,

THE TALE OF BALEN

I did, to set a bondman free,
But as I would thou hadst done by me,
That seeing what love must die to see
Love's end might well be woe's."

"Alas," the woful weakling said,
"I have slain what most I loved: I have shed
The blood most near my heart: the head
Lies cold as earth, defiled and dead,
That all my life was lighted by,
That all my soul bowed down before,
And now may bear with life no more:
For now my sorrow that I bore
Is twofold, and I die."

Then with his red wet sword he rove
His breast in sunder, where it clove
Life, and no pulse against it strove,
So sure and strong the deep stroke drove
Deathward: and Balen, seeing him dead,
Rode thence, lest folk would say he had slain
Those three: and ere three days again
Had seen the sun's might wax and wane,
Far forth he had spurred and sped.

And riding past a cross whereon
Broad golden letters written shone,
Saying, "No knight born may ride alone
Forth toward this castle," and all the stone
Glowed in the sun's glare even as though

THE TALE OF BALEN

Blood stained it from the crucified
Dead burden of one that there had died,
An old hoar man he saw beside
Whose face was wan as woe.

"Balén the Wild," he said, "this way
Thy way lies not: thou hast passed to-day
Thy bands: but turn again, and stay
Thy passage, while thy soul hath sway
Within thee, and through God's good power
It will avail thee:" and anon
His likeness as a cloud was gone,
And Balén's heart within him shone
Clear as the cloudless hour.

Nor fate nor fear might overcast
The soul now near its peace at last.
Suddenly, thence as forth he past,
A mighty and a deadly blast
Blown of a hunting-horn he heard,
As when the chase hath nobly sped.
"That blast is blown for me," he said,
"The prize am I who am yet not dead,"
And smiled upon the word.

As toward a royal hart's death rang
That note, whence all the loud wood sang
With winged and living sound that sprang
Like fire, and keen as fire's own fang
Pierced the sweet silence that it slew.

THE TALE OF BALEN

But nought like death or strife was here:
Fair semblance and most goodly cheer
They made him, they whose troop drew near
As death among them drew.

A hundred ladies well arrayed
And many a knight well weaponed made
That kindly show of cheer: the glade
Shone round them till its very shade
Lightened and laughed from grove to lawn
To hear and see them: so they brought
Within a castle fair as thought
Could dream that wizard hands had wrought
The guest among them drawn.

All manner of glorious joy was there:
Harping and dancing, loud and fair,
And minstrelsy that made of air
Fire, so like fire its raptures were.

Then the chief lady spake on high:
"Knight with the two swords, one of two
Must help you here or fall from you:
For needs you now must have ado
And joust with one hereby.

"A good knight guards an island here
Against all swords that chance brings near,
And there with stroke of sword and spear
Must all for whom these halls make cheer
Fight, and redeem or yield up life."

THE TALE OF BALEN

"An evil custom," Balen said,
"Is this, that none whom chance hath led
Hither, if knighthood crown his head,
May pass unstirred to strife."

"You shall not have ado to fight
Here save against one only knight,"
She said, and all her face grew bright
As hell-fire, lit with hungry light
That wicked laughter touched with flame.
"Well, since I shall thereto," said he,
"I am ready at heart as death for me:
Fain would I be where death should be
And life should lose its name."

"But travelling men whose goal afar
Shines as a cloud-constraining star
Are often weary, and wearier are
Their steeds that feel each fret and jar
Wherewith the wild ways wound them: yet,
Albeit my horse be weary, still
My heart is nowise weary; will
Sustains it even till death fulfil
My trust upon him set."

"Sir," said a knight thereby that stood,
"Meseems your shield is now not good
But worn with warrior work, nor could
Sustain in strife the strokes it would:
A larger will I lend you." "Ay,

THE TALE OF BALEN

Thereof I thank you," Balen said,
Being single of heart as one that read
No face aright whence faith had fled,
Nor dreamed that faith could fly.

And so he took that shield unknown
And left for treason's touch his own,
And toward that island rode alone,
Nor heard the blast against him blown
Sound in the wind's and water's sound,
But hearkening toward the stream's edge heard
Nought save the soft stream's rippling word,
Glad with the gladness of a bird,
That sang to the air around.

And there against the water-side
He saw, fast moored to rock and ride,
A fair great boat anear abide
Like one that waits the turning tide,
Wherein embarked his horse and he
Passed over toward no kindly strand:
And where they stood again on land
There stood a maiden hard at hand
Who seeing them wept to see.

And "O knight Balen," was her cry,
"Why have ye left your own shield? why
Come hither out of time to die?
For had ye kept your shield, thereby
Ye had yet been known, and died not here.

THE TALE OF BALEN

Great pity it is of you this day
As ever was of knight, or may
Be ever, seeing in war's bright way
Praise knows not Balen's peer."

And Balen said, "Thou hast heard my name
Right: it repenteth me, though shame
May tax me not with base men's blame,
That ever, hap what will, I came
Within this country; yet, being come,
For shame I may not turn again
Now, that myself and nobler men
May scorn me: now is more than then,
And faith bids fear be dumb.

"Be it life or death, my chance I take,
Be it life's to build or death's to break:
And fall what may, me lists not make
Moan for sad life's or death's sad sake."

Then looked he on his armour, glad
And high of heart, and found it strong:
And all his soul became a song
And soared in prayer that soared not long,
For all the hope it had.

Then saw he whence against him came
A steed whose trappings shone like flame,
And he that rode him showed the same
Pierce colour, bright as fire or fame,
But dark the visors were as night

THE TALE OF BALEN

That hid from Balen Balan's face,
And his from Balan: God's own grace
Forsook them for a shadowy space
Where darkness cast out light.

The two swords girt that Balen bare
Gave Balan for a breath's while there
Pause, wondering if indeed it were
Balen his brother, bound to dare
The chance of that unhappy quest:
But seeing not as he thought to see
His shield, he deemed it was not he,
And so, as fate bade sorrow be,
They laid their spears in rest.

So mighty was the course they ran
With spear to spear so great of span,
Each fell back stricken, man by man,
Horse by horse, borne down: so the ban
That wrought by doom against them wrought:
But Balen by his falling steed
Was bruised the sorer, being indeed
Way-weary, like a rain-bruised reed,
With travel ere he fought.

And Balen rose again from swoon
First, and went toward him: all too soon
He too then rose, and the evil boon
Of strength came back, and the evil tune
Of battle unnatural made again

THE TALE OF BALEN

Mad music as for death's wide ear
Listening and hungering toward the near
Last sigh that life or death might hear
At last from dying men.

Balan smote Balen first, and clove
His lifted shield that rose and strove
In vain against the stroke that drove
Down: as the web that morning wove
Of glimmering pearl from spray to spray
Dies when the strong sun strikes it, so
Shrank the steel, tempered thrice to show
Strength, as the mad might of the blow
Shore Balen's helm away.

Then turning as a turning wave
Against the land-wind, blind and brave
In hope that dreams despair may save,
With even the unhappy sword that gave
The gifts of fame and fate in one
He smote his brother, and there had nigh
Felled him: and while they breathed, his eye
Glanced up, and saw beneath the sky
Sights fairer than the sun.

The towers of all the castle there
Stood full of ladies, blithe and fair
As the earth beneath and the amorous air
About them and above them were:
So toward the blind and fateful fight

THE TALE OF BALEN

Again those brethren went, and sore
Were all the strokes they smote and bore,
And freathed again, and fell once more
To battle in their sight.

With blood that either spilt and bled
Was all the ground they fought on red,
And each knight's hauberk hewn and shred
Left each unmailed and naked, shed
From off them even as mantles cast:
And oft they breathed, and drew but breath
Brief as the word strong sorrow saith,
And poured and drank the draught of death,
Till fate was full at last.

And Balan, younger born than he
Whom darkness bade him slay, and be
Slain, as in mist where none may see
If aught abide or fall or flee,
Drew back a little and laid him down,
Dying: but Balen stood, and said,
As one between the quick and dead
Might stand and speak, "What good knight's head
Hath won this mortal crown?

"What knight art thou? for never I
Who now beside thee dead shall die
Found yet the knight afar or nigh
That matched me." Then his brother's eye
Flashed pride and love; he spake and smiled

THE TALE OF BALEN

And felt in death life's quickening flame,
And answered: "Balan is my name,
The good knight Balen's brother; fame
Calls and miscalls him wild."

The cry from Balen's lips that sprang
Sprang sharper than his sword's stroke rang.
More keen than death's or memory's fang,
Through sense and soul the shuddering pang
Shivered: and scarce he had cried, "Alas
That ever I should see this day,"
When sorrow swooned from him away
As blindly back he fell, and lay
Where sleep lets anguish pass.

But Balan rose on hands and knees
And crawled by childlike dim degrees
Up toward his brother, as a breeze
Creeps wingless over sluggard seas
When all the wind's heart fails it: so
Beneath their mother's eyes had he,
A babe that laughed with joy to be,
Made toward him standing by her knee
For love's sake long ago.

Then, gathering strength up for a space,
From off his brother's dying face
With dyng hands that wrought apace
While death and life would grant them grace
He loosed his helm and knew not him,

THE TALE OF BALEN

So scored with blood it was, and hewn
Athwart with darkening wounds: but soon
Life strove and shuddered through the swoon
Wherein its light lay dim.

And sorrow set these chained words free:
"O Balan, O my brother! me
Thou hast slain, and I, my brother, thee:
And now far hence, on shore and sea,
Shall all the wide world speak of us."
"Alas," said Balan, "that I might
Not know you, seeing two swords were dight
About you; now the unanswering sight
Hath here found answer thus.

"Because you bore another shield
Than yours, that even ere youth could wield
Like arms with manhood's tried and steeled
Shone as my star of battle-field,
I deemed it surely might not be
My brother." Then his brother spake
Fiercely: "Would God, for thy sole sake,
I had my life again, to take
Revenge for only thee!

"For all this deadly work was wrought
Of one false knight's false word and thought,
Whose mortal craft and counsel caught
And snared my faith who doubted nought,
And made me put my shield away.

THE TALE OF BALEN

Ah, might I live, I would destroy
That castle for its customs: joy
There makes of grief a deadly toy,
And death makes night of day."

"Well done were that, if aught were done
Well ever here beneath the sun,"
Said Balan: "better work were none:
For hither since I came and won
A woful honour born of death,
When here my hap it was to slay
A knight who kept this island way,
I might not pass by night or day
Hence, as this token saith.

"No more shouldst thou, for all the might
Of heart and hand that seals thee knight
Most noble of all that see the light,
Brother, hadst thou but slain in fight
Me, and arisen unscathed and whole,
As would to God thou hadst risen! though here
Light is as darkness, hope as fear,
And love as hate: and none draws near
Save toward a mortal goal."

Then, fair as any poison-flower
Whose blossom blights the withering bower
Whereon its blasting breath has power,
Forth fared the lady of the tower
With many a lady and many a knight,

THE TALE OF BALEN

And came across the water-way
Even where on death's dim border lay
Those brethren sent of her to slay
And die in kindless fight.

And all those hard light hearts were swayed
With pity passing like a shade
That stays not, and may be not stayed,
To hear the mutual moan they made,
Each to behold his brother die,
Saying, "Both we came out of one tomb,
One star-crossed mother's woful womb,
And so within one grave-pit's gloom
Untimely shall we lie."

And Balan prayed, as God should bless
That lady for her gentleness,
That where the battle's mortal stress
Had made for them perforce to press
The bed whence never man may rise
They twain, free now from hopes and fears,
Might sleep; and she, as one that hears,
Bowed her bright head: and very tears
Fell from her cold fierce eyes.

Then Balen prayed her send a priest
To housel them, that ere they ceased
The hansom of the heavenly feast
That fills with light from the answering east
The sunset of the life of man

THE TALE OF BALEN

Might bless them, and their lips be kissed
With death's requickening eucharist,
And death's and life's dim sunlit mist
 Pass as a stream that ran.

And so their dying rites were done:
And Balen, seeing the death-struck sun
Sink, spake as he whose goal is won:
"Now, when our trophied tomb is one,
 And over us our tale is writ,
How two that loved each other, two
Born and begotten brethren, slew
Each other, none that reads anew
 Shall choose but weep for it.

"And no good knight and no good man
Whose eye shall ever come to scan
The record of the imperious ban
That made our life so sad a span
 Shall read or hear, who shall not pray
For us for ever." Then anon
Died Balan; but the sun was gone,
And deep the stars of midnight shone,
 Ere Balen passed away.

And there low lying, as hour on hour
Fled, all his life in all its flower
Came back as in a sunlit shower
Of dreams, when sweet-souled sleep has power
 On life less sweet and glad to be.

THE TALE OF BALEN

He drank the draught of life's first wine
Again: he saw the moorland shine,
The rioting rapids of the Tyne,
The woods, the cliffs, the sea.

The joy that lives at heart and home,
The joy to rest, the joy to roam,
The joy of crags and scaurs he clomb,
The rapture of the encountering foam
Embraced and breasted of the boy,
The first good steed his knees bestrode,
The first wild sound of songs that flowed
Through ears that thrilled and heart that glowed,
Fulfilled his death with joy.

So, dying not as a coward that dies
And dares not look in death's dim eyes
Straight as the stars on seas and skies
Whence moon and sun recoil and rise,
He looked on life and death, and slept.
And there with morning Merlin came,
And on the tomb that told their fame
He wrote by Balan's Balen's name,
And gazed thereon, and wept.

For all his heart within him yearned
With pity like as fire that burned.
The fate his fateful eye discerned
Far off now dimmed it, ere he turned
His face toward Camelot, to tell

THE TALE OF BALEN

Arthur of all the storms that woke
Round Balen, and the dolorous stroke,
And how that last blind battle broke
The consummated spell.

“Alas,” King Arthur said, “this day
I have heard the worst that woe might say:
For in this world that wanes away
I know not two such knights as they.”

This is the tale that memory writes
Of men whose names like stars shall stand,
Balen and Balan, sure of hand,
Two brethren of Northumberland,
In life and death good knights.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

A TRAGEDY

Τοὺς ζῶντας εὖ δρᾶν· καθανὼν δὲ πᾶς ἀνὴρ
Γῇ καὶ σκιά· τὸ μηδὲν εἰς οὐδὲν ῥέπει

EUR. *Fr. Mel.* 20 (537)

TO THE MEMORY
OF
WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR

I NOW DEDICATE WITH EQUAL AFFECTION, REVERENCE, AND REGRET, A
POEM INSCRIBED TO HIM WHILE YET ALIVE IN WORDS WHICH ARE NOW
RETAINED BECAUSE THEY WERE LAID BEFORE HIM; AND TO WHICH, RATHER
THAN CANCEL THEM, I HAVE ADDED SUCH OTHERS AS WERE EVOKED BY THE
NEWS OF HIS DEATH: THAT THOUGH LOSING THE PLEASURE I MAY NOT LOSE
THE HONOUR OF INSCRIBING IN FRONT OF MY WORK THE HIGHEST OF CON-
TEMPORARY NAMES.

ῥῆχο δὴ Βορέηθεν ἀπότροπος, ἀλλὰ σε Νύμφαι
ἤγαγον ἀσπασίαν ἠδ' ὑπνοοὶ καθ' ἴλα,
πληροῦσαι μέλιτος θεόθεν στόμα, μή τι Ποσειδῶν
βλάβῃ, ἐν ὣσιν ἔχων σὴν μελίγηρυν ὄπα.
τοῖος ἀοιδὸς ἔφυς· ἡμεῖς δ' ἔτι κλαίομεν, οἳ σου
δευόμεθ' οἰχομένου, καὶ σε ποθοῦμεν αἰεὶ.
εἶπε δὲ Πιερίδων τις ἀναστρεφθεῖσα πρὸς ἄλλην·
ἦλθεν, ἰδοῦ, πάντων φίλτατος ἦλθε βροτῶν,
στέμματα δρεψάμενος νεοθηλέα χερσὶ γεραιαῖς,
καὶ πολὺν δάφναις ἀμφεκάλυψε κάρα,
ἠδ' ὅ τι Σικελικαῖς ἐπὶ πεκτίσιν, ἠδ' ὅ τι χόρδαις,
ἀσόμενος· πολλὴν γὰρ μετέβαλλε λύραν,
πολλάκι δ' ἐν βήσσαισι καθήμενον εὗρεν Ἀπόλλων,
ἄνθεσι δ' ἔστεψεν, τερπνὰ δ' ἔδωκε λέγειν,
Πᾶνα τ' αἰμυνηστόν τε Πίτυν Κόρυθόν τε δ' ὕσεδρον,
ἦν τ' ἐφίλησε θεὰν θνητὸς Ἀμαδρύαδα·
πόντου δ' ἐν μεγάροις ἐκοίμισε Κυμοδάμειαν,
τὴν τ' Ἀγαμεμνονίαν παῖδ' ἀπέδωκε πατρί,
πρὸς δ' ἱεροῦς Δελφοῦς θεόπληκτον ἐπεμψεν Ὀρίστην,
τειρόμενον στρυγεραῖς ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα θεαῖς.

ῥ'χεο δὴ καὶ ἄννευθε φίλων καὶ ἄννευθεν ἀοιδῆς,
ὄρεψόμενος μαλακῆς ἄνθεα Περσεφόνης.
ῥ'χεο · κοῦκ ἔτ' ἔσει, κοῦκ αὖ ποτέ σοι παρεδοῦμαι
ἀζόμενος, χειρῶν χερσὶ θιγῶν ὁσίαις ·
νῦν δ' αὖ μνησάμενον γλυκύπικρος ὑπήλυθεν αἰδῶς,
οἷα τυχῶν οἴου πρὸς σέθεν οἶος ἔχω ·
οὔποτε σοῖς, γέρον, ὄμμα φίλοις φίλον ὄμμασι τέρψω,
σῆς, γέρον, ἀψάμενος, φίλτατε, δεξιτερᾶς.
ἢ ψαφάρὰ κόνις, ἢ ψαφαρὸς βιός ἐστι τί τούτων
μῖον ἐφημερίων; οὐ κόνις ἀλλὰ βίος.
ἀλλὰ μοι ἡδύτερός γε πέλεις πολὺ τῶν ἔτ' ἐόντων,
ἔπλεο γάρ · σοὶ μὴν ταῦτα θανόντι φέρω,
παῦρα μὲν, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ κῆρος ἐτήτυμα · μηδ' ἀποτρεφθῆς,
πρὸς δὲ βαλὼν ἔτι νῦν ἥσυχον ὄμμα δέχου.
οὐ γὰρ ἔχω, μέγα δὴ τι θέλων, σέθεν ἄξια δοῦναι,
θαπτομένου περ ἀπῶν · οὐ γὰρ ἔνεστιν ἔμοι ·
οὐδὲ μελικρήτου παρέχειν γάνος · εἰ γὰρ ἐνείη
καὶ σε χεροῖν ψαῦσαι καὶ σέ ποτ' αὐθις ἰδεῖν,
δάκρυσί τε σπονδαῖς τε κᾶρα φίλον ἀμφιπολεύειν
ὀφθαλμούς θ' ἱεροὺς σοὺς ἱρόν τε δέμας.
εἴθ' ὄφελον · μάλα γὰρ τάδ' ἂν ἀμπαύσειε μερίμνης ·
νῦν δὲ πρόσωθεν ἄνευ σήματος οἴκτον ἄγω ·
οὐδ' ἐπιτυμβίδιον θρηνῶ μέλος, ἀλλ' ἀπαμνυθεῖς,
ἀλλ' ἀπάνευθεν ἔχων ἀμφιδακρυτὰ πάθη.
ἀλλὰ σὺ χαῖρε θανῶν, καὶ ἔχων γέρας ἴσθι πρὸς ἀνδρῶν
πρὸς τε θεῶν, ἐνέροις εἴ τις ἔπεστι θεός.
χαῖρε γέρον, φίλε χαῖρε πατέρ, πολὺ φέρτατ' ἀοιδῶν
ὧν ἵδομεν, πολὺ δὴ φέρτατ' αἰεσιμένων ·
χαῖρε, καὶ ὄλβον ἔχοις, οἷόν γε θανόντες ἔχουσιν,
ἡσυχίαν ἔχθρας καὶ φιλότῃτος ἄτερ.

σήματος οίχομένου σοι μνήματ' ἐς ὕστερον ἔσται,
σοί τε φίλῃ μνήμῃ μνήματος οίχομένου ·
ὃν Χάριτες κλαίουσι θεαί, κλαίει δ' Ἀφροδίτη
καλλιχόροις Μουσῶν τερψαμένη στεφάνοις.
οὐ γάρ ἤπαξ ἱερούς ποτε γῆρας ἔτριψεν ἀοιδούς·
τήνδε τὸ σὸν φαίνει μνήμα τόδ' ἀγλαΐαν.
ἢ φίλος ἦς μακάρεσσι βροτὸς, σοί δ' εἴ τιτι Νύμφαι
δῶρα ποθεινὰ νέμειν, ὕστατα δῶρ', ἔδοσαν.
τὰς νῦν χάλκεος ὕπνος ἔβη καὶ ἀνήνεμος αἰὼν,
καὶ συνθαπτομένοι μοῖραν ἔχουσι μίαν.
εὐδεις καὶ σὺ, καλὸν καὶ ἀγάκλυτον ἐν χθονὶ κοίλῃ
ὕπνον ἐφικόμενος, σῆς ἀπόνοσφι πάτρας,
τῇλε παρὰ ξανθοῦ Τυρσηνικὸν οἶδμα καθεύδεις
νάματος, ἢ δ' ἔτι σὴ μαῖά σε γαῖα ποθεῖ,
ἀλλ' ἀπέχεις, καὶ πρόσθε φιλόπολις ὦν περ ἀπεῖπας ·
εὐδὲ · μάκαρ δ' ἡμῖν οὐδ' ἀμέγαρτος ἔσει.
βαιοὺς ἐπιχθονίων γε χρόνος καὶ μοῖρα κρατήσῃ,
τοὺς δέ ποτ' εὐφροσύνη τοὺς δέ ποτ' ἄλγος ἔχει ·
πολλάκι δ' ἢ βλάπτει φάος ἢ σκότος ἀμφικαλύπτει
μυρομένους, δάκνει δ' ὕπνος ἐγρηγορότας ·
οὐδ' ἔθ' ὅτ' ἐν τύμβοισι κατέδραθεν ὄμμα θανόντων
ἢ σκότος ἢ τι φάος δῆξεται ἡελίου ·
οὐδ' ὄναρ ἐννύχιον καὶ ἐνύπνιον οὐδ' ὕπαρ ἔσται
ἢ ποτε τερπομένους ἢ ποτ' ὀδυρομένους ·
ἀλλ' ἔνα πάντες αἰεὶ θᾶκον συνέχουσι καὶ ἔδραν
ἀντὶ βροτῆς ἄβροτον, κάλλιμον ἀντι κακῆς.

THE ARGUMENT

ALTHÆA, daughter of Thestius and Eurythemis, queen of Calydon, being with child of Meleager her first-born son, dreamed that she brought forth a brand burning; and upon his birth came the three Fates and prophesied of him three things, namely these; that he should have great strength of his hands, and good fortune in this life, and that he should live no longer when the brand then in the fire were consumed: wherefore his mother plucked it forth and kept it by her. And the child being a man grown sailed with Jason after the fleece of gold, and won himself great praise of all men living; and when the tribes of the north and west made war upon Ætolia, he fought against their army and scattered it. But Artemis, having at the first stirred up these tribes to war against Æneus king of Calydon, because he had offered sacrifice to all the gods saving her alone, but her he had forgotten to honour, was yet more wroth because of the destruction of this army, and sent upon the land of Calydon a wild boar which slew many and wasted all their increase, but him could none slay, and many went against him and perished. Then were all the chief men of Greece gathered together, and among them Atalanta daughter of Iasius the

THE ARGUMENT

Arcadian, a virgin; for whose sake Artemis let slay the boar, seeing she favoured the maiden greatly; and Meleager having despatched it gave the spoil thereof to Atalanta, as one beyond measure enamoured of her; but the brethren of Althæa his mother, Toxeus and Plexippus, with such others as misliked that she only should bear off the praise whereas many had borne the labour, laid wait for her to take away her spoil; but Meleager fought against them and slew them: whom when Althæa their sister beheld and knew to be slain of her son, she waxed for wrath and sorrow like as one mad, and taking the brand whereby the measure of her son's life was meted to him, she cast it upon a fire; and with the wasting thereof his life likewise wasted away, that being brought back to his father's house he died in a brief space; and his mother also endured not long after for very sorrow; and this was his end, and the end of that hunting.

THE PERSONS

CHIEF HUNTSMAN

CHORUS

ALTHÆA

MELEAGER

CENEUS

ATALANTA

TOXEUS

PLEXIPPUS

HERALD

MESSENGER

SECOND MESSENGER

ἴστω δ' ὅστις οὐχ ὑπόπτερος
φροντίσιν δαίεις,
τὰν ἅ παιδολύμας τάλαινα θεστιᾶς μήσατο
πυρδαῖ τινα πρόνοιαν,
καταίθουσα παιδὸς δαφοινὸν
δαλὸν ἥλικ', ἐπεὶ μολῶν
ματρώθεν κελάδησε;
σύμμετρόν τε διαὶ βίου
υιορόκραντον ἐς ἄμαρ.

ÆSCH. *Cho.* 602-612.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

CHIEF HUNTSMAN

MAIDEN, and mistress of the months and stars
Now folded in the flowerless fields of heaven,
Goddess whom all gods love with threefold heart,
Being treble in thy divided deity,
A light for dead men and dark hours, a foot
Swift on the hills as morning, and a hand
To all things fierce and fleet that roar and range
Mortal, with gentler shafts than snow or sleep;
Hear now and help and lift no violent hand,
But favourable and fair as thine eye's beam
Hidden and shown in heaven; for I all night
Amid the king's hounds and the hunting men
Have wrought and worshipped toward thee; nor
 shall man
See goodlier hounds or deadlier edge of spears;
But for the end, that lies unreached at yet
Between the hands and on the knees of gods.
O fair-faced sun, killing the stars and dews
And dreams and desolation of the night!
Rise up, shine, stretch thine hand out, with thy bow
Touch the most dimmest height of trembling heaven,
And burn and break the dark about thy ways,
Shot through and through with arrows; let thine hair

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Lighten as flame above that flameless shell
Which was the moon, and thine eyes fill the world
And thy lips kindle with swift beams; let earth
Laugh, and the long sea fiery from thy feet
Through all the roar and ripple of streaming springs
And foam in reddening flakes and flying flowers
Shaken from hands and blown from lips of nymphs
Whose hair or breast divides the wandering wave
With salt close tresses cleaving lock to lock,
All gold, or shuddering and unfurrowed snow;
And all the winds about thee with their wings,
And fountain-heads of all the watered world;
Each horn of Acheloüs, and the green
Euenus, wedded with the straitening sea.
For in fair time thou comest; come also thou,
Twin-born with him, and virgin, Artemis,
And give our spears their spoil, the wild boar's hide,
Sent in thine anger against us for sin done
And bloodless altars without wine or fire.
Him now consume thou; for thy sacrifice
With sanguine-shining steam divides the dawn,
And one, the maiden rose of all thy maids,
Arcadian Atalanta, snowy-souled,
Fair as the snow and footed as the wind,
From Ladon and well-wooded Mænalus
Over the firm hills and the fleeting sea
Hast thou drawn hither, and many an armèd king,
Heroes, the crown of men, like gods in fight.
Moreover out of all the Ætolian land,
From the full-flowered Lelantian pasturage
To what of fruitful field the son of Zeus
Won from the roaring river and labouring sea

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

When the wild god shrank in his horn and fled
And foamed and lessened through his wrathful fords
Leaving clear lands that steamed with sudden sun,
These virgins with the lightening of the day
Bring thee fresh wreaths and their own sweeter hair,
Luxurious locks and flower-like mixed with flowers,
Clean offering, and chaste hymns; but me the time
Divides from these things; whom do thou not less
Help and give honour, and to mine hounds good
 speed,
And edge to spears, and luck to each man's hand.

CHORUS

When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces,
 The mother of months in meadow or plain
Fills the shadows and windy places
 With lisp of leaves and ripple of rain;
And the brown bright nightingale amorous
Is half assuaged for Itylus,
For the Thracian ships and the foreign faces,
 The tongueless vigil, and all the pain.

Come with bows bent and with emptying of quivers.
 Maiden most perfect, lady of light,
With a noise of winds and many rivers,
 With a clamour of waters, and with might;
Bind on thy sandals, O thou most fleet,
Over the splendour and speed of thy feet;
For the faint east quickens, the wan west shivers,
 Round the feet of the day and the feet of the
 night.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Where shall we find her, how shall we sing to her,
Fold our hands round her knees, and cling?
O that man's heart were as fire and could spring to
her,

Fire, or the strength of the streams that spring!
For the stars and the winds are unto her
As raiment, as songs of the harp-player;
For the risen stars and the fallen cling to her,
And the southwest-wind and the west-wind sing.

For winter's rains and ruins are over,
And all the season of snows and sins;
The days dividing lover and lover,
The light that loses, the night that wins;
And time remembered is grief forgotten,
And frosts are slain and flowers begotten,
And in green underwood and cover
Blossom by blossom the spring begins.

The full streams feed on flower of rushes,
Ripe grasses trammel a travelling foot,
The faint fresh flame of the young year flushes
From leaf to flower and flower to fruit;
And fruit and leaf are as gold and fire,
And the oat is heard above the lyre,
And the hoofèd heel of a satyr crushes
The chestnut-husk at the chestnut-root.

And Pan by noon and Bacchus by night,
Fleeter of foot than the fleet-foot kid,
Follows with dancing and fills with delight
The Mænad and the Bassarid;

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

And soft as lips that laugh and hide
The laughing leaves of the trees divide,
And screen from seeing and leave in sight
The god pursuing, the maiden hid.

The ivy falls with the Bacchanal's hair
Over her eyebrows hiding her eyes;
The wild vine slipping down leaves bare
Her bright breast shortening into sighs;
The wild vine slips with the weight of its leaves,
But the berried ivy catches and cleaves
To the limbs that glitter, the feet that scare
The wolf that follows, the fawn that flies.

ALTHÆA

What do ye singing? what is this ye sing?

CHORUS

Flowers bring we, and pure lips that please the gods,
And raiment meet for service: lest the day
Turn sharp with all its honey in our lips.

ALTHÆA

Night, a black hound, follows the white fawn day,
Swifter than dreams the white flown feet of sleep;
Will ye pray back the night with any prayers?
And though the spring put back a little while
Winter, and snows that plague all men for sin
And the iron time of cursing, yet I know
Spring shall be ruined with the rain, and storm
Eat up like fire the ashen autumn days.
I marvel what men do with prayers awake

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Who dream and die with dreaming; any god,
Yea the least god of all things called divine,
Is more than sleep and waking; yet we say,
Perchance by praying a man shall match his god.
For if sleep have no mercy, and man's dreams
Bite to the blood and burn into the bone,
What shall this man do waking? By the gods,
He shall not pray to dream sweet things to-night,
Having dreamt once more bitter things than death

CHORUS

Queen, but what is it that hath burnt thine heart?
For thy speech flickers like a blown-out flame.

ALTHÆA

Look, ye say well, and know not what ye say;
For all my sleep is turned into a fire,
And all my dreams to stuff that kindles it.

CHORUS

Yet one doth well being patient of the gods.

ALTHÆA

Yea, lest they smite us with some four-foot plague.

CHORUS

But when time spreads find out some herb for it.

ALTHÆA

And with their healing herbs infect our blood.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

CHORUS

What ails thee to be jealous of their ways?

ALTHÆA

What if they give us poisonous drinks for wine?

CHORUS

They have their will; much talking mends it not.

ALTHÆA

And gall for milk, and cursing for a prayer?

CHORUS

Have they not given life, and the end of life?

ALTHÆA

Lo, where they heal, they help not; thus they do,
They mock us with a little piteousness,
And we say prayers, and weep; but at the last,
Sparing awhile, they smite and spare no whit.

CHORUS

Small praise man gets dispraising the high gods:
What have they done that thou dishonourest them?

ALTHÆA

First¹ Artemis for all this harried land
I praise not, and for wasting of the boar
That mars with tooth and tusk and fiery feet
Green pasturage and the grace of standing corn

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

And meadow and marsh with springs and unblown
leaves,
Flocks and swift herds and all that bite sweet grass,
I praise her not; what things are these to praise?

CHORUS

But when the king did sacrifice, and gave
Each god fair dues of wheat and blood and wine,
Her not with bloodshed nor burnt-offering
Revered he, nor with salt or cloven cake;
Wherefore being wroth she plagued the land; but
now
Takes off from us fate and her heavy things.
Which deed of these twain were not good to praise?
For a just deed looks always either way
With blameless eyes, and mercy is no fault

ALTHÆA

Yea, but a curse she hath sent above all these
To hurt us where she healed us; and hath lit
Fire where the old fire went out, and where the
wind
Slackened, hath blown on us with deadlier air.

CHORUS

What storm is this that tightens all our sail?

ALTHÆA

Love, a thwart sea-wind full of rain and foam

CHORUS

Whence blown, and born under what stormier star?

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

ALTHÆA

Southward across Euenus from the sea.

CHORUS

Thy speech turns toward Arcadia like blown wind.

ALTHÆA

Sharp as the north sets when the snows are out.

CHORUS

Nay, for this maiden hath no touch of love.

ALTHÆA

I would she had sought in some cold gulf of sea
Love, or in dens where strange beasts lurk, or fire,
Or snows on the extreme hills, or iron land
Where no spring is; I would she had sought therein
And found, or ever love had found her here.

CHORUS

She is holier than all holy days or things,
The sprinkled water or fume of perfect fire;
Chaste, dedicated to pure prayers, and filled
With higher thoughts than heaven; a maiden clean,
Pure iron, fashioned for a sword; and man
She loves not; what should one such do with love?

1

ALTHÆA

Look you, I speak not as one light of wit,
But as a queen speaks, being heart-vexed; for oft
I hear my brothers wrangling in mid hall,

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

And am not moved; and my son chiding them,
And these things nowise move me, but I know
Foolish and wise men must be to the end,
And feed myself with patience; but this most,
This moves me, that for wise men as for fools
Love is one thing, an evil thing, and turns
Choice words and wisdom into fire and air.
And in the end shall no joy come, but grief,
Sharp words and soul's division and fresh tears
Flower-wise upon the old root of tears brought
forth,

Fruit-wise upon the old flower of tears sprung up,
Pitiful sighs, and much regrafted pain.

These things are in my presage, and myself
Am part of them and know not; but in dreams
The gods are heavy on me, and all the fates
Shed fire across my eyelids mixed with night,
And burn me blind, and disilluminate
My sense of seeing, and my perspicuous soul
Darken with vision; seeing I see not, hear
And hearing am not holpen, but mine eyes
Stain many tender broideries in the bed
Drawn up about my face that I may weep
And the king wake not; and my brows and lips
Tremble and sob in sleeping, like swift flames
That tremble, or water when it sobs with heat
Kindled from under; and my tears fill my breast
And speck the fair dyed pillows round the king
With barren showers and salter than the sea,
Such dreams divide me dreaming; for long since
I dreamed that out of this my womb had sprung
Fire and a firebrand; this was ere my son,

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Meleager, a goodly flower in fields of fight,
Felt the light touch him coming forth, and wailed
Childlike; but yet he was not; and in time
I bare him, and my heart was great; for yet
So royally was never strong man born,
Nor queen so nobly bore as noble a thing
As this my son was: such a birth God sent
And such a grace to bear it. Then came in
Three weaving women, and span each a thread,
Saying This for strength and That for luck, and one
Saying Till the brand upon the hearth burn down
So long shall this man see good days and live.
And I with gathered raiment from the bed
Sprang, and drew forth the brand, and cast on it
Water, and trod the flame bare-foot, and crushed
With naked hand spark beaten out of spark
And blew against and quenched it; for I said,
These are the most high Fates that dwell with us,
And we find favour a little in their sight,
A little, and more we miss of, and much time
Fails us; howbeit they have pitied me, O son,
And thee most piteous, thee a tenderer thing
Than any flower of fleshly seed alive.
Wherefore I kissed and hid him with my hands,
And covered under arms and hair, and wept,
And feared to touch him with my tears, and laughed;
So light a thing was this man, grown so great
Men cast their heads back, seeing against the sun
Blaze the armed man carven on his shield, and hear
The laughter of little bells along the brace
Ring, as birds singing or flutes blown, and watch,
High up, the cloven shadow of either plume

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Divide the bright light of the brass, and make
His helmet as a windy and wintering moon
Seen through blown cloud and plume - like drift,
when ships
Drive, and men strive with all the sea, and oars
Break, and the beaks dip under, drinking death;
Yet was he then but a span long, and moaned
With inarticulate mouth inseparate words,
And with blind lips and fingers wrung my breast
Hard, and thrust out with foolish hands and feet,
Murmuring; but those grey women with bound hair
Who fright the gods frightened not him; he laughed
Seeing them, and pushed out hands to feel and haul
Distaff and thread, intangible; but they
Passed, and I hid the brand, and in my heart
Laughed likewise, having all my will of heaven.
But now I know not if to left or right
The gods have drawn us hither; for again
I dreamt, and saw the black brand burst on fire
As a branch bursts in flower, and saw the flame
Fade flower-wise, and Death came and with dry lips
Blew the charred ash into my breast; and Love
Trampled the ember and crushed it with swift feet.
This I have also at heart; that not for me,
Not for me only or son of mine, O girls,
The gods have wrought life, and desire of life,
Heart's love and heart's division; but for all
There shines one sun and one wind blows till night.
And when night comes the wind sinks and the sun,
And there is no light after, and no storm,
But sleep and much forgetfulness of things.
In such wise I gat knowledge of the gods

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Years hence, and heard high sayings of one most
wise,

Eurythemis my mother, who beheld
With eyes alive and spake with lips of these
As one on earth disfleshed and disallied
From breath or blood corruptible; such gifts
Time gave her, and an equal soul to these
And equal face to all things; thus she said.
But whatsoever intolerable or glad
The swift hours weave and unweave, I go hence
Full of mine own soul, perfect of myself,
Toward mine and me sufficient; and what chance
The gods cast lots for and shake out on us,
That shall we take, and that much bear withal.
And now, before these gather to the hunt,
I will go arm my son and bring him forth,
Lest love or some man's anger work him harm.

CHORUS

Before the beginning of years
There came to the making of man
Time, with a gift of tears;
Grief, with a glass that ran;
Pleasure, with pain for leaven;
Summer, with flowers that fell;
Remembrance fallen from heaven,
And madness risen from hell;
Strength without hands to smite;
Love that endures for a breath:
Night, the shadow of light,
And life, the shadow of death.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

And the high gods took in hand
Fire, and the falling of tears,
And a measure of sliding sand
From under the feet of the years;
And froth and drift of the sea;
And dust of the labouring earth;
And bodies of things to be
In the houses of death and of birth;
And wrought with weeping and laughter,
And fashioned with loathing and love,
With life before and after
And death beneath and above,
For a day and a night and a morrow,
That his strength might endure for a span
With travail and heavy sorrow,
The holy spirit of man.

From the winds of the north and the south
They gathered as unto strife;
They breathed upon his mouth,
They filled his body with life;
Eyesight and speech they wrought
For the veils of the soul therein,
A time for labour and thought,
A time to serve and to sin;
They gave him light in his ways,
And love, and a space for delight,
And beauty and length of days,
And night, and sleep in the night.
His speech is a burning fire;
With his lips he travaileth;

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

In his heart is a blind desire,
In his eyes foreknowledge of death;
He weaves, and is clothed with derision;
Sows, and he shall not reap;
His life is a watch or a vision
Between a sleep and a sleep.

MELEAGER

O sweet new heaven and air without a star,
Fair day, be fair and welcome, as to men
With deeds to do and praise to pluck from thee.
Come forth a child, born with clear sound and light,
With laughter and swift limbs and prosperous looks;
That this great hunt with heroes for the hounds
May leave thee memorable and us well sped.

ALTHÆA

Son, first I praise thy prayer, then bid thee speed;
But the gods hear men's hands before their lips,
And heed beyond all crying and sacrifice
Light of things done and noise of labouring men.
But thou, being armed and perfect for the deed,
Abide; for like rain-flakes in a wind they grow,
The men thy fellows, and the choice of the world,
Bound to root out the tuskèd plague, and leave
Thanks and safe days and peace in Calydon.

MELEAGER

For the whole city and all the low-lying land
Flames. and the soft air sounds with them that
come;
The gods give all these fruit of all their works.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

ALTHÆA

Set thine eye thither and fix thy spirit and say
Whom there thou knowest; for sharp mixed shadow
and wind

Blown up between the morning and the mist,
With steam of steeds and flash of bridle or wheel,
And fire, and parcels of the broken dawn,
And dust divided by hard light, and spears
That shine and shift as the edge of wild beasts' eyes,
Smite upon mine; so fiery their blind edge
Burns, and bright points break up and baffle day.

MELEAGER

The first, for many I know not, being far off,
Peleus the Larissæan, couched with whom
Sleeps the white sea-bred wife and silver-shod,
Fair as fled foam, a goddess; and their son
Most swift and splendid of men's children born,
Most like a god, full of the future fame.

ALTHÆA

Who are these shining like one sundered star?

MELEAGER

Thy sister's sons, a double flower of men.

ALTHÆA

O sweetest kin to me in all the world,
O twin-born blood of Leda, gracious heads
Like kindled lights in untempestuous heaven,
Fair flower-like stars on the iron foam of fight,

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

With what glad heart and kindliness of soul,
Even to the staining of both eyes with tears
And kindling of warm eyelids with desire,
A great way off I greet you, and rejoice
Seeing you so fair, and moulded like as gods.
Far off ye come, and least in years of these,
But lordliest, but worth love to look upon.

MELEAGER

Even such (for sailing hither I saw far hence,
And where Eurotas hollows his moist rock
Nigh Sparta with a strenuous-hearted stream)
Even such I saw their sisters; one swan-white,
The little Helen, and less fair than she
Fair Clytæmnestra, grave as pasturing fawns
Who feed and fear some arrow; but at whiles,
As one smitten with love or wrung with joy,
She laughs and lightens with her eyes, and then
Weeps; whereat Helen, having laughed, weeps too,
And the other chides her, and she being chid speaks
nought,
But cheeks and lips and eyelids kisses her,
Laughing; so fare they, as in their bloomless bud
And full of unblown life, the blood of gods.

ALTHÆA

Sweet days befall them and good loves and lords,
And tender and temperate honours of the hearth,
Peace, and a perfect life and blameless bed.
But who shows next an eagle wrought in gold,
That flames and beats broad wings against the sun
And with void mouth gapes after emptier prey?

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

MELEAGER

Know by that sign the reign of Telamon
Between the fierce mouths of the encountering
 brine
On the strait reefs of twice-washed Salamis.

ALTHÆA

For like one great of hand he bears himself,
Vine-chapleted, with savours of the sea,
Glittering as wine and moving as a wave.
But who girt round there roughly follows him?

MELEAGER

Ancæus, great of hand, an iron bulk,
Two-edged for fight as the axe against his arm,
Who drives against the surge of stormy spears
Full-sailed; him Cepheus follows, his twin-born,
Chief name next his of all Arcadian men.

ALTHÆA

Praise be with men abroad; chaste lives with us,
Home-keeping days and household reverences.

MELEAGER

Next by the left unsandalled foot know thou
The sail and oar of this Ætolian land,
Thy brethren, Toxeus and the violent-souled
Plexippus, over-swift with hand and tongue;
For hands are fruitful, but the ignorant mouth
Blows and corrupts their work with barren breath.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

ALTHÆA

Speech too bears fruit, being worthy; and air blows
down

Things poisonous, and high-seated violences,
And with charmed words and songs have men put
out

Wild evil, and the fire of tyrannies.

MELEAGER

Yea, all things have they, save the gods and love.

ALTHÆA

Love thou the law and cleave to things ordained.

MELEAGER

Law lives upon their lips whom these applaud.

ALTHÆA

How sayest thou these? what god applauds new
things?

MELEAGER

Zeus, who hath fear and custom under foot.

ALTHÆA

But loves not laws thrown down and lives awry.

MELEAGER

Yet is not less himself than his own law.

ALTHÆA

Nor shifts and shuffles old things up and down.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

MELEAGER

But what he will remoulds and discreates.

ALTHÆA

Much, but not this, that each thing live its life.

MELEAGER

Nor only live, but lighten and lift up higher

ALTHÆA

Pride breaks itself, and too much gained is gone.

MELEAGER

Things gained are gone, but great things done
endure.

ALTHÆA

Child, if a man serve law through all his life
And with his whole heart worship, him all gods
Praise; but who loves it only with his lips,
And not in heart and deed desiring it
Hides a perverse will with obsequious words,
Him heaven infatuates and his twin-born fate
Tracks, and gains on him, scenting sins far off,
And the swift hounds of violent death devour.
Be man at one with equal-minded gods,
So shall he prosper; not through laws torn up,
Violated rule and a new face of things.
A woman armed makes war upon herself,
Unwomanlike, and treads down use and wont
And the sweet common honour that she hath,
Love, and the cry of children, and the hand

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Trothplight and mutual mouth of marriages.
This doth she, being unloved; whom if one love,
Not fire nor iron and the wide-mouthed wars
Are deadlier than her lips or braided hair.
For of the one comes poison, and a curse
Falls from the other and burns the lives of men.
But thou, son, be not filled with evil dreams,
Nor with desire of these things; for with time
Blind love burns out; but if one feed it full
Till some discolouring stain dyes all his life,
He shall keep nothing praiseworthy, nor die
The sweet wise death of old men honourable,
Who have lived out all the length of all their years
Blameless, and seen well-pleased the face of gods,
And without shame and without fear have wrought
Things memorable, and while their days held out
In sight of all men and the sun's great light
Have gat them glory and given of their own praise
To the earth that bare them and the day that bred,
Home friends and far-off hospitalities,
And filled with gracious and memorial fame
Lands loved of summer or washed by violent seas,
Towns populous and many unfooted ways,
And alien lips and native with their own.
But when white age and venerable death
Mow down the strength and life within their limbs,
Drain out the blood and darken their clear eyes,
Immortal honour is on them, having past
Through splendid life and death desirable
To the clear seat and remote throne of souls,
Lands indiscoverable in the unheard-of west,
Round which the strong stream of a sacred sea

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Rolls without wind for ever, and the snow
There shows not her white wings and windy feet,
Nor thunder nor swift rain saith anything,
Nor the sun burns, but all things rest and thrive;
And these, filled full of days, divine and dead,
Sages and singers fiery from the god,
And such as loved their land and all things good
And, best beloved of best men, liberty,
Free lives and lips, free hands of men free-born,
And whatsoever on earth was honourable
And whosoever of all the ephemeral seed,
Live there a life no liker to the gods
But nearer than their life of terrene days.
Love thou such life and look for such a death.
But from the light and fiery dreams of love
Spring heavy sorrows and a sleepless life,
Visions not dreams, whose lids no charm shall close
Nor song assuage them waking; and swift death
Crushes with sterile feet the unripening ear,
Treads out the timeless vintage; whom do thou
Eschewing embrace the luck of this thy life,
Not without honour; and it shall bear to thee
Such fruit as men reap from spent hours and wear,
Few men, but happy; of whom be thou, O son,
Happiest, if thou submit thy soul to fate,
And set thine eyes and heart on hopes high-born
And divine deeds and abstinence divine.
So shalt thou be toward all men all thy days
As light and might communicable, and burn
From heaven among the stars above the hours,
And break not as a man breaks nor burn down:
For to whom other of all heroic names

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Have the gods given his life in hand as thine?
And gloriously hast thou lived, and made thy life
To me that bare thee and to all men born
Thankworthy, a praise for ever; and hast won
fame

When wild wars broke all round thy father's house,
And the mad people of windy mountain ways
Laid spears against us like a sea, and all
Ætolia thundered with Thessalian hoofs;
Yet these, as wind baffles the foam, and beats
Straight back the relaxed ripple, didst thou break
And loosen all their lances, till undone
And man from man they fell; for ye twain stood
God against god, Ares and Artemis,
And thou the mightier; wherefore she unleashed
A sharp-toothed curse thou too shalt overcome;
For in the greener blossom of thy life
Ere the full blade caught flower, and when time
gave

Respite, thou didst not slacken soul nor sleep,
But with great hand and heart seek praise of men
Out of sharp straits and many a grievous thing,
Seeing the strange foam of undivided seas
On channels never sailed in, and by shores
Where the old winds cease not blowing, and all the
night

Thunders, and day is no delight to men.

I

CHORUS

Meleager, a noble wisdom and fair words
The gods have given this woman; hear thou these.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

MELEAGER

O mother, I am not fain to strive in speech
Nor set my mouth against thee, who art wise
Even as they say and full of sacred words.
But one thing I know surely, and cleave to this;
That though I be not subtle of wit as thou
Nor womanlike to weave sweet words, and melt
Mutable minds of wise men as with fire,
I too, doing justly and reverencing the gods,
Shall not want wit to see what things be right.
For whom they love and whom reject, being gods,
There is no man but seeth, and in good time
Submits himself, refraining all his heart.
And I too as thou sayest have seen great things;
Seen elsewhere, but chiefly when the sail
First caught between stretched ropes the roaring
west,
And all our oars smote eastward, and the wind
First flung round faces of seafaring men
White splendid snow-flakes of the sundering foam,
And the first furrow in virginal green sea
Followed the plunging ploughshare of hewn pine,
And closed, as when deep sleep subdues man's breath
Lips close and heart subsides; and closing, shone
Sunlike with many a Nereid's hair, and moved
Round many a trembling mouth of doubtful gods,
Risen out of sunless and sonorous gulfs
Through waning water and into shallow light,
That watched us; and when flying the dove was
snared
As with men's hands, but we shot after and sped

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Clear through the irremeable Symplegades;
And chiefliest when hoar beach and herbless cliff
Stood out ahead from Colchis, and we heard
Clefs hoarse with wind, and saw through narrowing
reefs

The lightning of the intolerable wave
Flash, and the white wet flame of breakers burn
Far under a kindling south-wind, as a lamp
Burns and bends all its blowing flame one way;
Wild heights untravelled of the wind, and vales
Cloven seaward by their violent streams, and white
With bitter flowers and bright salt scurf of brine;
Heard sweep their sharp swift gales, and bowing
birdwise

Shriek with birds' voices, and with furious feet
Tread loose the long skirts of a storm; and saw
The whole white Euxine clash together and fall
Full-mouthed, and thunderous from a thousand
throats:

Yet we drew thither and won the fleece and won
Medea, deadlier than the sea; but there
Seeing many a wonder and fearful things to men
I saw not one thing like this one seen here,
Most fair and fearful, feminine, a god,
Faultless; whom I that love not, being unlike,
Fear, and give honour, and choose from all the
gods.

CENEUS

Lady, the daughter of Thestius, and thou, son,
Not ignorant of your strife nor light of wit,
Scared with vain dreams and fluttering like spent
fire,

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

I come to judge between you, but a king
Full of past days and wise from years endured.
Nor thee I praise, who art fain to undo things done:
Nor thee, who art swift to esteem them overmuch.
For what the hours have given is given, and this
Changeless; howbeit these change, and in good
time

Devise new things and good, not one thing still.
Us have they sent now at our need for help
Among men armed a woman, foreign born,
Virgin, not like the natural flower of things
That grows and bears and brings forth fruit and
dies;

Unlovable, no light for a husband's house,
Espoused; a glory among unwedded girls,
And chosen of gods who reverence maidenhood.
These too we honour in honouring her; but thou,
Abstain thy feet from following, and thine eyes
From amorous touch; nor set toward hers thine
heart,

Son, lest hate bear no deadlier fruit than love.

ALTHÆA

O king, thou art wise, but wisdom halts; and just,
But the gods love not justice more than fate,
And smite the righteous and the violent mouth,
And mix with insolent blood the reverent man's,
And bruise the holier as the lying lips.
Enough; for wise words fail me, and my heart
Takes fire and trembles flamewise, O my son,
O child, for thine head's sake; mine eyes wax thick,
Turning toward thee, so goodly a weaponed man,

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

So glorious; and for love of thine own eyes
They are darkened, and tears burn them, fierce as
fire,

And my lips pause and my soul sinks with love.
But by thine hand, by thy sweet life and eyes,
By thy great heart and these clasped knees, O son,
I pray thee that thou slay me not with thee.

For there was never a mother woman-born
Loved her sons better; and never a queen of men
More perfect in her heart toward whom she loved.
For what lies light on many and they forget,
Small things and transitory as a wind o' the sea,
I forget never; I have seen thee all thine years
A man in arms, strong and a joy to men
Seeing thine head glitter and thine hand burn its way
Through a heavy and iron furrow of sundering
spears;

But always also a flower of three suns old,
The small one thing that lying drew down my life
To lie with thee and feed thee; a child and weak,
Mine, a delight to no man, sweet to me.

Who then sought to thee? who gat help? who knew
If thou wert goodly? nay, no man at all.

Or what sea saw thee, or sounded with thine oar,
Child? or what strange land shone with war through
thee?

But fair for me thou wert, O little life,
Fruitless, the fruit of mine own flesh, and blind,
More than much gold, ungrown, a foolish flower.
For silver nor bright snow nor feather of foam
Was whiter, and no gold yellower than thine hair,
O child, my child; and now thou art lordlier grown,

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Not lovelier, nor a new thing in mine eyes,
I charge thee by thy soul and this my breast,
Fear thou the gods and me and thine own heart,
Lest all these turn against thee; for who knows
What wind upon what wave of altering time
Shall speak a storm and blow calamity?
And there is nothing stabile in the world
But the gods break it; yet not less, fair son,
If but one thing be stronger, if one endure,
Surely the bitter and the rooted love
That burns between us, going from me to thee,
Shall more endure than all things. What dost thou,
Following strange loves? why wilt thou kill mine
heart?

Lo, I talk wild and windy words, and fall
From my clear wits, and seem of mine own self
Dethroned, dispraised, disseated; and my mind,
That was my crown, breaks, and mine heart is gone,
And I am naked of my soul, and stand
Ashamed, as a mean woman; take thou thought:
Live if thou wilt, and if thou wilt not, look,
The gods have given thee life to lose or keep,
Thou shalt not die as men die, but thine end
Fallen upon thee shall break me unaware.

MELEAGER

Queen, my whole heart is molten with thy tears,
And my limbs yearn with pity of thee, and love
Compels with grief mine eyes and labouring breath;
For what thou art I know thee, and this thy breast
And thy fair eyes I worship, and am bound
Toward thee in spirit and love thee in all my soul.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

For there is nothing terribler to men
Than the sweet face of mothers, and the might.
But what shall be let be; for us the day
Once only lives a little, and is not found.
Time and the fruitful hour are more than we,
And these lay hold upon us; but thou, God,
Zeus, the sole steersman of the helm of things,
Father, be swift to see us, and as thou wilt
Help: or if adverse, as thou wilt, refrain.

■

CHORUS

We have seen thee, O Love, thou art fair; thou art
 goodly, O Love;
Thy wings make light in the air as the wings of a
 dove.
Thy feet are as winds that divide the stream of the
 sea;
Earth is thy covering to hide thee, the garment of
 thee.
Thou art swift and subtle and blind as a flame of fire;
Before thee the laughter, behind thee the tears of
 desire;
And twain go forth beside thee, a man with a maid;
Her eyes are the eyes of a bride whom delight makes
 afraid;
As the breath in the buds that stir is her bridal breath:
But Fate is the name of her; and his name is Death.

For an evil blossom was born
 Of sea-foam and the frothing of blood,
 Blood-red and bitter of fruit,
 And the seed of it laughter and tears,

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

And the leaves of it madness and scorn;
A bitter flower from the bud,
Sprung of the sea without root,
Sprung without graft from the years.

The weft of the world was untorn
That is woven of the day on the night,
The hair of the hours was not white
Nor the raiment of time overworn,
When a wonder, a world's delight,
A perilous goddess was born;
And the waves of the sea as she came
Clove, and the foam at her feet,
Fawning, rejoiced to bring forth
A fleshly blossom, a flame
Filling the heavens with heat
To the cold white ends of the north.

And in air the clamorous birds,
And men upon earth that hear
Sweet articulate words
Sweetly divided apart,
And in shallow and channel and mere
The rapid and footless herds,
Rejoiced, being foolish of heart.

For all they said upon earth,
She is fair, she is white like a dove,
And the life of the world in her breath
Breathes, and is born at her birth;
For they knew thee for mother of love,
And knew thee not mother of death.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

What hadst thou to do being born,
Mother, when winds were at ease,
As a flower of the springtime of corn,
A flower of the foam of the seas?
For bitter thou wast from thy birth,
Aphrodite, a mother of strife;
For before thee some rest was on earth,
A little respite from tears,
A little pleasure of life;
For life was not then as thou art,
But as one that waxeth in years
Sweet-spoken, a fruitful wife;
Earth had no thorn, and desire
No sting, neither death any dart;
What hadst thou to do amongst these,
Thou, clothed with a burning fire,
Thou, girt with sorrow of heart,
Thou, sprung of the seed of the seas
As an ear from a seed of corn,
As a brand plucked forth of a pyre,
As a ray shed forth of the morn,
For division of soul and disease,
For a dart and a sting and a thorn?
What ailed thee then to be born?

Was there not evil enough,
Mother, and anguish on earth
Born with a man at his birth,
Wastes underfoot, and above
Storm out of heaven, and dearth
Shaken down from the shining thereof,

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Wrecks from afar overseas
And peril of shallow and firth,
And tears that spring and increase
In the barren places of mirth,
That thou, having wings as a dove,
Being girt with desire for a girth,
That thou must come after these,
That thou must lay on him love?

Thou shouldst not so have been born:
But death should have risen with thee,
Mother, and visible fear,
Grief, and the wringing of hands,
And noise of many that mourn;
The smitten bosom, the knee
Bowed, and in each man's ear
A cry as of perishing lands,
A moan as of people in prison,
A tumult of infinite griefs;
And thunder of storm on the sands,
And wailing of wives on the shore;
And under thee newly arisen
Loud shoals and shipwrecking reefs
Fierce air and violent light;
Sail rent and sundering oar,
Darkness, and noises of night;
Clashing of streams in the sea,
Wave against wave as a sword,
Clamour of currents, and foam;
Rains making ruin on earth,
Winds that wax ravenous and roam
As wolves in a wolfish horde;

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Fruits growing faint in the tree,
And blind things dead in their birth;
Famine, and blighting of corn,
When thy time was come to be born.

All these we know of; but thee
Who shall discern or declare?
In the uttermost ends of the sea
The light of thine eyelids and hair,
The light of thy bosom as fire
Between the wheel of the sun
And the flying flames of the air?
Wilt thou turn thee not yet nor have pity,
But abide with despair and desire
And the crying of armies undone,
Lamentation of one with another
And breaking of city by city;
The dividing of friend against friend,
The severing of brother and brother;
Wilt thou utterly bring to an end?
Have mercy, mother!

For against all men from of old
Thou hast set thine hand as a curse,
And cast out gods from their places.
These things are spoken of thee.
Strong kings and goodly with gold
Thou hast found out arrows to pierce,
And made their kingdoms and races
As dust and surf of the sea.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

All these, overburdened with woes
And with length of their days waxen weak,
Thou slewest; and sentest moreover
Upon Tyro an evil thing,
Rent hair and a fetter and blows
Making bloody the flower of the cheek,
Though she lay by a god as a lover,
Though fair, and the seed of a king.
For of old, being full of thy fire,
She endured not longer to wear
On her bosom a saffron vest,
On her shoulder an ashwood quiver;
Being mixed and made one through desire
With Enipeus, and all her hair
Made moist with his mouth, and her breast
Filled full of the foam of the river.

ATALANTA

Sun, and clear light among green hills, and day
Late risen and long sought after, and you just gods
Whose hands divide anguish and recompense,
But first the sun's white sister, a maid in heaven,
On earth of all maids worshipped—hail, and hear,
And witness with me if not without sign sent,
Not without rule and reverence, I a maid
Hallowed, and huntress holy as whom I serve,
Here in your sight and eyeshot of these men
Stand, girt as they toward hunting, and my shafts
Drawn; wherefore all ye stand up on my side,
If I be pure and all ye righteous gods,
Lest one revile me, a woman, yet no wife,
That bear a spear for spindle, and this bow strung

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

For a web woven; and with pure lips salute
Heaven, and the face of all the gods, and dawn
Filling with maiden flames and maiden flowers
The starless fold o' the stars, and making sweet
The warm wan heights of the air, moon-trodden ways
And breathless gates and extreme hills of heaven.
Whom, having offered water and bloodless gifts,
Flowers, and a golden circlet of pure hair,
Next Artemis I bid be favourable
And make this day all golden, hers and ours,
Gracious and good and white to the unblamed end.
But thou, O well-beloved, of all my days
Bid it be fruitful, and a crown for all,
To bring forth leaves and bind round all my hair
With perfect chaplets woven for thine of thee.
For not without the word of thy chaste mouth,
For not without law given and clean command,
Across the white straits of the running sea
From Elis even to the Acheloïan horn,
I with clear winds came hither and gentle gods,
Far off my father's house, and left uncheered
Iasius, and uncheered the Arcadian hills
And all their green-haired waters, and all woods
Disconsolate, to hear no horn of mine
Blown, and behold no flash of swift white feet.

MELEAGER

For thy name's sake and awe toward thy chaste head,
O holiest Atalanta, no man dares
Praise thee, though fairer than whom all men praise,
And godlike for thy grace of hallowed hair
And holy habit of thine eyes, and feet

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

That make the blown foam neither swift nor white
Though the wind winnow and whirl it; yet we praise
Gods, found because of thee adorable
And for thy sake praiseworthy from all men:
Thee therefore we praise also, thee as these,
Pure, and a light lit at the hands of gods.

TOXEUS

How long will ye whet spears with eloquence,
Fight, and kill beasts dry-handed with sweet words?
Cease, or talk still and slay thy boars at home.

PLEXIPPUS

Why, if she ride among us for a man,
Sit thou for her and spin; a man grown girl
Is worth a woman weaponed; sit thou here.

MELEAGER

Peace, and be wise; no gods love idle speech.

PLEXIPPUS

Nor any man a man's mouth woman-tongued.

MELEAGER

For my lips bite not sharper than mine hands.

PLEXIPPUS

Nay, both bite soft, but no whit softly mine.

MELEAGER

Keep thine hands clean; they have time enough to
stain.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

PLEXIPPUS

For thine shall rest and wax not red to-day.

MELEAGER

Have all thy will of words; talk out thine heart.

ALTHÆA

Refrain your lips, O brethren, and my son,
Lest words turn snakes and bite you uttering them.

TOXEUS

Except she give her blood before the gods,
What profit shall a maid be among men?

PLEXIPPUS

Let her come crowned and stretch her throat for a knife,
Bleat out her spirit and die, and so shall men
Through her too prosper and through prosperous gods,
But nowise through her living; shall she live
A flower-bud of the flower-bed, or sweet fruit
For kisses and the honey-making mouth,
And play the shield for strong men and the spear?
Then shall the heifer and her mate lock horns,
And the bride overbear the groom, and men
Gods; for no less division sunders these;
Since all things made are seasonable in time,
But if one alter unseasonable are all.
But thou, O Zeus, hear me that I may slay
This beast before thee and no man halve with me
Nor woman, lest these mock thee, though a god,
Who hast made men strong, and thou being wise be
held
Foolish; for wise is that thing which endures.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

ATALANTA

Men, and the chosen of all this people, and thou,
King, I beseech you a little bear with me.
For if my life be shameful that I live,
Let the gods witness and their wrath; but these
Cast no such word against me. Thou, O mine,
O holy, O happy goddess, if I sin
Changing the words of women and the works
For spears and strange men's faces, hast not thou
One shaft of all thy sudden seven that pierced
Seven through the bosom or shining throat or side,
All couched about one mother's loosening knees,
All holy born, engrafted of Tantalus?
But if toward any of you I am overbold
That take thus much upon me, let him think
How I, for all my forest holiness,
Fame, and this armed and iron maidenhood,
Pay thus much also; I shall have no man's love
For ever, and no face of children born
Or feeding lips upon me or fastening eyes
For ever, nor being dead shall kings my sons
Mourn me and bury, and tears on daughters' cheeks
Burn; but a cold and sacred life, but strange,
But far from dances and the back-blowing torch,
Far off from flowers or any bed of man,
Shall my life be for ever: me the snows
That face the first o' the morning, and cold hills
Full of the land-wind and sea-travelling storms
An many a wandering wing of noisy nights
That know the thunder and hear the thickening
wolves—

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Me the utmost pine and footless frost of woods
That talk with many winds and gods, the hours
Re-risen, and white divisions of the dawn,
Springs thousand-tongued with the intermitting
reed

And streams that murmur of the mother snow—
Me these allure, and know me; but no man
Knows, and my goddess only. Lo now, see
If one of all you these things vex at all.
Would God that any of you had all the praise
And I no manner of memory when I die,
So might I show before her perfect eyes
Pure, whom I follow, a maiden to my death.
But for the rest let all have all they will;
For is it a grief to you that I have part,
Being woman merely, in your male might and deeds
Done by main strength? yet in my body is throned
As great a heart, and in my spirit, O men,
I have not less of godlike. Evil it were
That one a coward should mix with you, one hand
Fearful, one eye abase itself; and these
Well might ye hate and well revile, not me.
For not the difference of the several flesh
Being vile or noble or beautiful or base
Makes praiseworthy, but purer spirit and heart
Higher than these meaner mouths and limbs, that
feed,
Rise, rest, and are and are not; and for me,
What should I say? but by the gods of the world
And this my maiden body, by all oaths
That bind the tongue of men and the evil will
I am not mighty-minded, nor desire

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Crowns, nor the spoil of slain things nor the fame;
Feed ye on these, eat and wax fat; cry out,
Laugh, having eaten, and leap without a lyre,
Sing, mix the wind with clamour, smite and shake
Sonomous timbrels and tumultuous hair,
And fill the dance up with tempestuous feet,
For I will none; but having prayed my prayers
And made thank-offering for prosperities,
I shall go hence and no man see me more.
What thing is this for you to shout me down,
What, for a man to grudge me this my life
As it were envious of all yours, and I
A thief of reputations? nay, for now,
If there be any highest in heaven, a god
Above all thrones and thunders of the gods
Throned, and the wheel of the world roll under
him,
Judge he between me and all of you, and see
If I transgress at all: but ye, refrain
Transgressing hands and reinless mouths, and keep
Silence, lest by much foam of violent words
And proper poison of your lips ye die.

ŒNEUS

O flower of Tegea, maiden, fleetest foot
And holiest head of women, have good cheer
Of thy good words: but ye, depart with her
In peace and reverence, each with blameless eye
Following his fate; exalt your hands and hearts,
Strike, cease not, arrow on arrow and wound on
wound,
And go with gods and with the gods return.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

CHORUS

Who hath given man speech? or who hath set
therein

A thorn for peril and a snare for sin?

For in the word his life is and his breath,

And in the word his death,

That madness and the infatuate heart may breed

From the word's womb the deed

And life bring one thing forth ere all pass by,

Even one thing which is ours yet cannot die—

Death. Hast thou seen him ever anywhere,

Time's twin-born brother, imperishable as he

Is perishable and plaintive, clothed with care

And mutable as sand,

But death is strong and full of blood and fair

And perdurable and like a lord of land?

Nay, time thou seest not, death thou wilt not see

Till life's right hand be loosened from thine hand

And thy life-days from thee.

For the gods very subtly fashion

Madness with sadness upon earth:

Not knowing in any wise compassion,

Nor holding pity of any worth;

And many things they have given and taken,

And wrought and ruined many things;

The firm land have they loosed and shaken,

And sealed the sea with all her springs;

They have wearied time with heavy burdens

And vexed the lips of life with breath:

Set men to labour and given them guerdons,

Death, and great darkness after death:

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Put moans into the bridal measure
And on the bridal wools a stain;
And circled pain about with pleasure,
And girdled pleasure about with pain;
And strewed one marriage-bed with tears and fire
For extreme loathing and supreme desire.

What shall be done with all these tears of ours?

Shall they make watersprings in the fair heaven
To bathe the brows of morning? or like flowers
Be shed and shine before the starriest hours,

Or made the raiment of the weeping Seven?
Or rather, O our masters, shall they be
Food for the famine of the grievous sea,

A great well-head of lamentation
Satiating the sad gods? or fall and flow
Among the years and seasons to and fro,

And wash their feet with tribulation
And fill them full with grieving ere they go?

Alas, our lords, and yet alas again,
Seeing all your iron heaven is gilt as gold

But all we smite thereat in vain;
Smite the gates barred with groanings manifold,

But all the floors are paven with our pain.
Yea, and with weariness of lips and eyes,
With breaking of the bosom, and with sighs,

We labour, and are clad and fed with grief
And filled with days we would not fain behold
And nights we would not hear of; we wax old,

All we wax old and wither like a leaf.
We are outcast, strayed between bright sun and moon;
Our light and darkness are as leaves of flowers,

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Black flowers and white, that perish; and the noon
As midnight, and the night as daylight hours.
A little fruit a little while is ours,
And the worm finds it soon.

But up in heaven the high gods one by one
Lay hands upon the draught that quickeneth,
Fulfilled with all tears shed and all things done,
And stir with soft imperishable breath
The bubbling bitterness of life and death,
And hold it to our lips and laugh; but they
Preserve their lips from tasting night or day,
Lest they too change and sleep, the fates that
spun,
The lips that made us and the hands that slay;
Lest all these change, and heaven bow down to
none,
Change and be subject to the secular sway
And terrene revolution of the sun.
Therefore they thrust it from them, putting time
away.

I would the wine of time, made sharp and sweet
With multitudinous days and nights and tears
And many mixing savours of strange years,
Were no more trodden of them under feet,
Cast out and spilt about their holy places:
That life were given them as a fruit to eat
And death to drink as water; that the light
Might ebb, drawn backward from their eyes, and
night
Hide for one hour the imperishable faces.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

That they might rise up sad in heaven, and know
Sorrow and sleep, one paler than young snow,
 One cold as blight of dew and ruinous rain;
Rise up and rest and suffer a little, and be
Awhile as all things born with us and we,
 And grieve as men, and like slain men be slain.

For now we know not of them; but one saith
 The gods are gracious, praising God; and one,
When hast thou seen? or hast thou felt his breath
 Touch, nor consume thine eyelids as the sun,
Nor fill thee to the lips with fiery death?
 None hath beheld him, none
Seen above other gods and shapes of things,
Swift without feet and flying without wings,
Intolerable, not clad with death or life,
 Insatiable, not known of night or day,
The lord of love and loathing and of strife
 Who gives a star and takes a sun away;
Who shapes the soul, and makes her a barren
 wife
To the earthly body and grievous growth of clay;
Who turns the large limbs to a little flame
 And binds the great sea with a little sand;
Who makes desire, and slays desire with shame;
 Who shakes the heaven as ashes in his hand;
Who, seeing the light and shadow for the same,
 Bids day waste night as fire devours a brand,
Smites without sword, and scourges without rod;
 The supreme evil, God.
Yea, with thine hate, O God, thou hast covered us,
 One saith, and hidden our eyes away from sight,

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

And made us transitory and hazardous,
Light things and slight;
Yet have men praised thee, saying, He hath made
man thus,
And he doeth right.
Thou hast kissed us, and hast smitten; thou hast
laid
Upon us with thy left hand life, and said,
Live: and again thou hast said, Yield up your
breath,
And with thy right hand laid upon us death.
Thou hast sent us sleep, and stricken sleep with
dreams,
Saying, Joy is not, but love of joy shall be;
Thou hast made sweet springs for all the pleasant
streams,
In the end thou hast made them bitter with the
sea.
Thou hast fed one rose with dust of many men;
Thou hast marred one face with fire of many tears;
Thou hast taken love, and given us sorrow again;
With pain thou hast filled us full to the eyes and
ears.
Therefore because thou art strong, our father, and
we
Feeble; and thou art against us, and thine hand
Constrains us in the shallows of the sea
And breaks us at the limits of the land;
Because thou hast bent thy lightnings as a bow,
And loosed the hours like arrows; and let fall
Sins and wild words and many a wingèd woe
And wars among us, and one end of all;

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Because thou hast made the thunder, and thy feet
Are as a rushing water when the skies
Break, but thy face as an exceeding heat
And flames of fire the eyelids of thine eyes;
Because thou art over all who are over us;
Because thy name is life and our name death;
Because thou art cruel and men are piteous,
And our hands labour and thine hand scattereth;
Lo, with hearts rent and knees made tremulous,
Lo, with ephemeral lips and casual breath,
At least we witness of thee ere we die
That these things are not otherwise, but thus;
That each man in his heart sigheth, and saith,
That all men even as I,
All we are against thee, against thee, O God most
high.

But ye, keep ye on earth
Your lips from over-speech,
Loud words and longing are so little worth;
And the end is hard to reach.
For silence after grievous things is good,
And reverence, and the fear that makes men
whole,
And shame, and righteous governance of blood,
And lordship of the soul.
But from sharp words and wits men pluck no
fruit,
And gathering thorns they shake the tree at root;
For words divide and rend;
But silence is most noble till the end.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

ALTHÆA

I heard within the house a cry of news
And came forth eastward hither, where the dawn
Cheers first these warder gods that face the sun
And next our eyes unrisen; for unaware
Came clashes of swift hoofs and trampling feet
And through the windy pillared corridor
Light sharper than the frequent flames of day
That daily fill it from the fiery dawn;
Gleams, and a thunder of people that cried out,
And dust and hurrying horsemen; 'lo their chief,
That rode with Æneus rein by rein, returned.
What cheer, O herald of my lord the king?

HERALD

Lady, good cheer and great; the boar is slain.

CHORUS

Praised be all gods that look toward Calydon.

ALTHÆA

Good news and brief; but by whose happier hand?

HERALD

A maiden's and a prophet's and thy son's.

I

ALTHÆA

Well fare the spear that severed him and life.

HERALD

Thine own, and not an alien, hast thou blest.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

ALTHÆA

Twice be thou too for my sake blest and his.

HERALD

At the king's word I rode afoam for thine.

ALTHÆA

Thou sayest he tarrieth till they bring the spoil?

HERALD

Hard by the quarry, where they breathe, O queen.

ALTHÆA

Speak thou their chance; but some bring flowers and
crown

These gods and all the lintel, and shed wine,
Fetch sacrifice and slay; for heaven is good.

HERALD

Some furlongs northward where the brakes begin
West of that narrowing range of warrior hills
Whose brooks have bled with battle when thy son
Smote Acarnania, there all they made halt,
And with keen eye took note of spear and hound,
Royally ranked; Laertes island-born,
The young Gerenian Nestor, Panopeus,
And Cepheus and Ancæus, mightiest thewed,
Arcadians; next, and evil-eyed of these,
Arcadian Atalanta, with twain hounds
Lengthening the leash, and under nose and brow
Glittering with lipless tooth and fire-swift eye;

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

But from her white braced shoulder the plumed
shafts

Rang, and the bow shone from her side; next her
Meleager, like a sun in spring that strikes
Branch into leaf and bloom into the world,
A glory among men meaner; Iphicles,
And following him that slew the biform bull
Pirithous, and divine Eurytion,
And, bride-bound to the gods, Æacides.
Then Telamon his brother, and Argive-born
The seer and sayer of visions and of truth,
Amphiaraus; and a four-fold strength,
Thine, even thy mother's and thy sister's sons.
And recent from the roar of foreign foam
Jason, and Dryas twin-begot with war,
A blossom of bright battle, sword and man
Shining; and Idas, and the keenest eye
Of Lynceus, and Admetus twice-espoused,
And Hippasus and Hyleus, great in heart.
These having halted bade blow horns, and rode
Through woods and waste lands cleft by stormy
streams,

Past yew-trees and the heavy hair of pines,
And where the dew is thickest under oaks,
This way and that; but questing up and down
They saw no trail nor scented; and one said,
Plexippus, Help, or help not, Artemis,
And we will flay thy boarskin with male hands;
But saying, he ceased and said not that he would
Seeing where the green ooze of a sun-struck marsh
Shook with a thousand reeds untunable,
And in their moist and multitudinous flower

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Slept no soft sleep, with violent visions fed,
The blind bulk of the immeasurable beast.
And seeing, he shuddered with sharp lust of praise
Through all his limbs, and launched a double dart.
And missed; for much desire divided him,
Too hot of spirit and feebler than his will,
That his hand failed, though fervent; and the shaft,
Sundering the rushes, in a tamarisk stem
Shook, and stuck fast; then all abode save one,
The Arcadian Atalanta; from her side
Sprang her hounds, labouring at the leash, and
slipped,
And plashed ear-deep with plunging feet; but she
Saying, Speed it as I send it for thy sake,
Goddess, drew bow and loosed; the sudden string
Rang, and sprang inward, and the waterish air
Hissed, and the moist plumes of the songless reeds
Moved as a wave which the wind moves no more.
But the boar heaved half out of ooze and slime
His tense flank trembling round the barbèd wound,
Hateful; and fiery with invasive eyes
And bristling with intolerable hair
Plunged, and the hounds clung, and green flowers
and white
Reddened and broke all round them where they
came.
And charging with sheer tusk he drove, and smote
Hyleus; and sharp death caught his sudden soul,
And violent sleep shed night upon his eyes.
Then Peleus, with strong strain of hand and heart,
Shot; but the sidelong arrow slid, and slew
His comrade born and loving countryman,

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Under the left arm smitten, as he no less
Poised a like arrow; and bright blood brake afoam,
And falling, and weighed back by clamorous arms,
Sharp rang the dead limbs of Eurytion.

Then one shot happier, the Cadmean seer,
Amphiaraus; for his sacred shaft
Pierced the red circlet of one ravening eye
Beneath the brute brows of the sanguine boar,
Now bloodier from one slain; but he so galled
Sprang straight, and rearing cried no lesser cry
Than thunder and the roar of wintering streams
That mix their own foam with the yellower sea;
And as a tower that falls by fire in fight
With ruin of walls and all its archery,
And breaks the iron flower of war beneath,
Crushing charred limbs and molten arms of men;
So through crushed branches and the reddening
brake

Clamoured and crashed the fervour of his feet,
And trampled, springing sideways from the tusk,
Too tardy a moving mould of heavy strength,
Ancæus; and as flakes of weak-winged snow
Break, all the hard thews of his heaving limbs
Broke, and rent flesh fell every way, and blood
Flew, and fierce fragments of no more a man.
Then all the heroes drew sharp breath, and gazed,
And smote not; but Meleager, but thy son,
Right in the wild way of the coming curse
Rock-rooted, fair with fierce and fastened lips,
Clear eyes, and springing muscle and shortening
limb—

With chin aslant indrawn to a tightening throat,

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Grave, and with gathered sinews, like a god,—
Aimed on the left side his well-handled spear
Grasped where the ash was knottiest hewn, and
smote,

And with no missile wound, the monstrous boar
Right in the hairiest hollow of his hide
Under the last rib, sheer through bulk and bone,
Deep in; and deeply smitten, and to death,
The heavy horror with his hanging shafts
Leapt, and fell furiously, and from raging lips
Foamed out the latest wrath of all his life.

And all they praised the gods with mightier heart,
Zeus and all gods, but chiefliest Artemis,
Seeing; but Meleager bade whet knives and flay,
Strip and stretch out the splendour of the spoil;
And hot and horrid from the work all these
Sat, and drew breath and drank and made great
cheer

And washed the hard sweat off their calmer brows.
For much sweet grass grew higher than grew the
reed,

And good for slumber, and every holier herb,
Narcissus, and the low-lying melilote,
And all of goodliest blade and bloom that springs
Where, hid by heavier hyacinth, violet buds
Blossom and burn; and fire of yellower flowers
And light of crescent lilies, and such leaves
As fear the Faun's and know the Dryad's foot;
Olive and ivy and poplar dedicate,
And many a well-spring overwatched of these.
There now they rest; but me the king bade bear
Good tidings to rejoice this town and thee.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Wherefore be glad, and all ye give much thanks,
For fallen is all the trouble of Calydon.

ALTHÆA

Laud ye the gods; for this they have given is
good,
And what shall be they hide until their time.
Much good and somewhat grievous hast thou said,
And either well; but let all sad things be,
Till all have made before the prosperous gods
Burnt-offering, and poured out the floral wine.
Look fair, O gods, and favourable; for we
Praise you with no false heart or flattering mouth,
Being merciful, but with pure souls and prayer.

HERALD

Thou hast prayed well; for whoso fears not these,
But once being prosperous waxes huge of heart,
Him shall some new thing unaware destroy.

CHORUS

O that I now, I too were
By deep wells and water-floods,
Streams of ancient hills, and where
All the wan green places bear
Blossoms cleaving to the sod,
Fruitless fruit, and grasses fair,
Or such darkest ivy-buds
As divide thy yellow hair,
Bacchus, and their leaves that nod
Round thy fawnskin brush the bare
Snow-soft shoulders of a god;

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

There the year is sweet, and there
Earth is full of secret springs,
And the fervent rose-cheeked hours,
Those that marry dawn and noon,
There are sunless, there look pale
In dim leaves and hidden air,
Pale as grass or latter flowers
Or the wild vine's wan wet rings
Full of dew beneath the moon,
And all day the nightingale
Sleeps, and all night sings;
There in cold remote recesses
That nor alien eyes assail,
Feet, nor imminence of wings,
Nor a wind nor any tune,
Thou, O queen and holiest,
Flower the whitest of all things,
With reluctant lengthening tresses
And with sudden splendid breast
Save of maidens un beholden,
There art wont to enter, there
Thy divine swift limbs and golden
Maiden growth of unbound hair,
Bathed in waters white,
Shine, and many a maid's by thee
In moist woodland or the hilly
Flowerless brakes where wells abound
Out of all men's sight;
Or in lower pools that see
All their margins clothed all round
With the innumerable lily,
Whence the golden-girdled bee

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Flits through flowering rush to fret
White or duskier violet,
Fair as those that in far years
With their buds left luminous
And their little leaves made wet,
From the warmer dew of tears,
Mother's tears in extreme need,
Hid the limbs of Iamus,
Of thy brother's seed;
For his heart was piteous
Toward him, even as thine heart now
Pitiful toward us;
Thine, O goddess, turning hither
A benignant blameless brow;
Seeing enough of evil done
And lives withered as leaves wither
In the blasting of the sun;
Seeing enough of hunters dead,
Ruin enough of all our year,
Herds and harvests slain and shed,
Herdsmen stricken many an one,
Fruits and flocks consumed together,
And great length of deadly days.
Yet with reverent lips and fear
Turn we toward thee, turn and praise.
For this lightening of clear weather
And prosperities begun.
For not seldom, when all air
As bright water without breath
Shines, and when men fear not, fate
Without thunder unaware
Breaks, and brings down death.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Joy with grief ye great gods give,
Good with bad, and overbear
All the pride of us that live,
All the high estate,
As ye long since overbore,
As in old time long before,
Many a strong man and a great,
All that were.

But do thou, sweet, otherwise,
Having heed of all our prayer,
Taking note of all our sighs;
We beseech thee by thy light,
By thy bow, and thy sweet eyes,
And the kingdom of the night,
Be thou favourable and fair;
By thine arrows and thy might
And Orion overthrown;
By the maiden thy delight,
By the indissoluble zone
And the sacred hair.

MESSENGER

Maidens, if ye will sing now, shift your song,
Bow down, cry, wail for pity; is this a time
For singing? nay, for strewing of dust and ash,
Rent raiment, and for bruising of the breast.

CHORUS

What new thing wolf-like lurks behind thy words?
What snake's tongue in thy lips? what fire in the
eyes?

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

MESSENGER

Bring me before the queen and I will speak.

CHORUS

Lo, she comes forth as from thank-offering made.

MESSENGER

A barren offering for a bitter gift.

ALTHÆA

What are these borne on branches, and the face
Covered? no mean men living, but now slain
Such honour have they, if any dwell with death.

MESSENGER

Queen, thy twain brethren and thy mother's sons.

ALTHÆA

Lay down your dead till I behold their blood
If it be mine indeed, and I will weep.

MESSENGER

Weep if thou wilt, for these men shall no more.

ALTHÆA

O brethren, O my father's sons, of me
Well loved and well reputed, I should weep
Tears dearer than the dear blood drawn from you
But that I know you not uncomforted,
Sleeping no shameful sleep, however slain,
For my son surely hath avenged you dead.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

MESSENGER

Nay, should thine own seed slay himself, O queen?

ALTHÆA

Thy double word brings forth a double death.

MESSENGER

Know this then singly, by one hand they fell.

ALTHÆA

What mutterest thou with thine ambiguous mouth?

MESSENGER

Slain by thy son's hand; is that saying so hard?

ALTHÆA

Our time is come upon us: it is here.

CHORUS

O miserable, and spoiled at thine own hand.

ALTHÆA

Wert thou not called Meleager from this womb?

CHORUS

A grievous huntsman hath it bred to thee.

ALTHÆA

Wert thou born fire, and shalt thou not devour?

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

CHORUS

The fire thou madest, will it consume even thee?

ALTHÆA

My dreams are fallen upon me; burn thou too.

CHORUS

Not without God are visions born and die.

ALTHÆA

The gods are many about me; I am one.

CHORUS

She groans as men wrestling with heavier gods.

ALTHÆA

They rend me, they divide me, they destroy.

CHORUS

Or one labouring in travail of strange births.

ALTHÆA

They are strong, they are strong; I am broken, and
these prevail.

CHORUS

The god is great against her; she will die.

ALTHÆA

Yea, but not now; for my heart too is great.
I would I were not here in sight of the sun.
But thou, speak all thou sawest, and I will die.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

MESSENGER

O queen, for queenlike hast thou borne thyself,
A little word may hold so great mischance.
For in division of the sanguine spoil
These men thy brethren wrangling bade yield up
The boar's head and the horror of the hide
That this might stand a wonder in Calydon,
Hallowed; and some drew toward them; but thy son
With great hands grasping all that weight of hair
Cast down the dead heap clanging and collapsed
At female feet, saying This thy spoil not mine,
Maiden, thine own hand for thyself hath reaped,
And all this praise God gives thee: she thereat
Laughed, as when dawn touches the sacred night
The sky sees laugh and redden and divide
Dim lips and eyelids virgin of the sun,
Hers, and the warm slow breasts of morning heave,
Fruitful, and flushed with flame from lamp-lit hours,
And maiden undulation of clear hair
Colour the clouds; so laughed she from pure heart,
Lit with a low blush to the braided hair,
And rose-coloured and cold like very dawn,
Golden and godlike, chastely with chaste lips,
A faint grave laugh; and all they held their peace,
And she passed by them. Then one cried Lo now,
Shall not the Arcadian shoot out lips at us,
Saying all we were despoiled by this one girl?
And all they rode against her violently
And cast the fresh crown from her hair, and now
They had rent her spoil away, dishonouring her,
Save that Meleager, as a tame lion chafed,

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Bore on them, broke them, and as fire cleaves wood
So clove and drove them, smitten in twain; but she
Smote not nor heaved up hand; and this man first,
Plexippus, crying out This for love's sake, sweet,
Drove at Meleager, who with spear straightening
Pierced his cheek through; then Toxeus made for
him,

Dumb, but his spear spake; vain and violent words,
Fruitless; for him too stricken through both sides
The earth felt falling, and his horse's foam
Blanched thy son's face, his slayer; and these being
slain,

None moved nor spake; but Ceneus bade bear hence
These made of heaven infatuate in their deaths,
Foolish; for these would baffle fate, and fell.
And they passed on, and all men honoured her,
Being honourable, as one revered of heaven.

ALTHÆA

What say you, women? is all this not well done?

CHORUS

No man doth well but God hath part in him.

ALTHÆA

But no part here; for these my brethren born
Ye have no part in, these ye know not of
As I that was their sister, a sacrifice
Slain in their slaying. I would I had died for
these;

For this man dead walked with me, child by child,
And made a weak staff for my feeble feet

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

With his own tender wrist and hand, and held
And led me softly and shewed me gold and steel
And shining shapes of mirror and bright crown
And all things fair; and threw light spears, and
brought

Young hounds to huddle at my feet and thrust
Tame heads against my little maiden breasts
And please me with great eyes; and those days went
And these are bitter and I a barren queen
And sister miserable, a grievous thing
And mother of many curses; and she too,
My sister Leda, sitting overseas
With fair fruits round her, and her faultless lord,
Shall curse me, saying A sorrow and not a son,
Sister, thou barest, even a burning fire,
A brand consuming thine own soul and me.
But ye now, sons of Thestius, make good cheer,
For ye shall have such wood to funeral fire
As no king hath; and flame that once burnt down
Oil shall not quicken or breath relume or wine
Refresh again; much costlier than fine gold,
And more than many lives of wandering men.

CHORUS

O queen, thou hast yet with thee love-worthy things,
Thine husband, and the great strength of thy son.

ALTHÆA

Who shall get brothers for me while I live?
Who bear them? who bring forth in lieu of these?
Are not our fathers and our brethren one,
And no man like them? are not mine here slain?

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Have we not hung together, he and I,
Flowerwise feeding as the feeding bees,
With mother-milk for honey? and this man too,
Dead, with my son's spear thrust between his sides,
Hath he not seen us, later born than he,
Laugh with lips filled, and laughed again for love?
There were no sons then in the world, nor spears,
Nor deadly births of women; but the gods
Allowed us, and our days were clear of these.
I would I had died unwedded, and brought forth
No swords to vex the world; for these that spake
Sweet words long since and loved me will not speak
Nor love nor look upon me; and all my life
I shall not hear nor see them living men.
But I too living, how shall I now live?
What life shall this be with my son, to know
What hath been and desire what will not be,
Look for dead eyes and listen for dead lips,
And kill mine own heart with remembering them,
And with those eyes that see their slayer alive
Weep, and wring hands that clasp him by the hand?
How shall I bear my dreams of them, to hear
False voices, feel the kisses of false mouths
And footless sound of perished feet, and then
Wake and hear only it may be their own hounds
Whine masterless in miserable sleep,
And see their boar-spears and their beds and seats
And all the gear and housings of their lives
And not the men? shall hounds and horses mourn,
Pine with strange eyes, and prick up hungry ears,
Famish and fail at heart for their dear lords,
And I not heed at all? and those blind things

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Fall off from life for love's sake, and I live?
Surely some death is better than some life,
Better one death for him and these and me
For if the gods had slain them it may be
I had endured it; if they had fallen by war
Or by the nets and knives of privy death
And by hired hands while sleeping, this thing too
I had set my soul to suffer; or this hunt,
Had this despatched them under tusk or tooth
Torn, sanguine, trodden, broken; for all deaths
Or honourable or with facile feet avenged
And hands of swift gods following, all save this,
Are bearable; but not for their sweet land
Fighting, but not a sacrifice, lo these
Dead; for I had not then shed all mine heart
Out at mine eyes: then either with good speed,
Being just, I had slain their slayer atoningly,
Or strewn with flowers their fire and on their tombs
Hung crowns, and over them a song, and seen
Their praise outflame their ashes: for all men,
All maidens, had come thither, and from pure lips
Shed songs upon them, from heroic eyes
Tears; and their death had been a deathless life;
But now, by no man hired nor alien sword,
By their own kindred are they fallen, in peace,
After much peril, friendless among friends,
By hateful hands they loved; and how shall mine
Touch these returning red and not from war,
These fatal from the vintage of men's veins,
Dead men my brethren? how shall these wash off
No festal stains of undelightful wine,
How mix the blood, my blood on them, with me,

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Holding mine hand? or how shall I say, son,
That am no sister? but by night and day
Shall we not sit and hate each other, and think
Things hate-worthy? not live with shamefast eyes,
Brow-beaten, treading soft with fearful feet,
Each unupbraided, each without rebuke
Convicted, and without a word reviled
Each of another? and I shall let thee live
And see thee strong and hear men for thy sake
Praise me, but these thou wouldest not let live
No man shall praise for ever? these shall lie
Dead, unbeloved, unholpen, all through thee?
Sweet were they toward me living, and mine heart
Desired them, but was then well satisfied,
That now is as men hungered; and these dead
I shall want always to the day I die.
For all things else and all men may renew;
Yea, son for son the gods may give and take,
But never a brother or sister any more.

CHORUS

Nay, for the son lies close about thine heart,
Full of thy milk, warm from thy womb, and drains
Life and the blood of life and all thy fruit,
Eats thee and drinks thee as who breaks bread and
eats,
Treads wine and drinks, thyself, a sect of thee;
And if he feed not, shall not thy flesh faint?
Or drink not, are not thy lips dead for thirst?
This thing moves more than all things, even thy
son,

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

That thou cleave to him; and he shall honour thee,
Thy womb that bare him and the breasts he knew,
Reverencing most for thy sake all his gods.

ALTHÆA

But these the gods too gave me, and these my son,
Not reverencing his gods nor mine own heart
Nor the old sweet years nor all venerable things,
But cruel, and in his ravin like a beast,
Hath taken away to slay them: yea, and she
She the strange woman, she the flower, the sword,
Red from spilt blood, a mortal flower to men,
Adorable, detestable—even she
Saw with strange eyes and with strange lips rejoiced,
Seeing these mine own slain of mine own, and me
Made miserable above all miseries made,
A grief among all women in the world,
A name to be washed out with all men's tears.

CHORUS

Strengthen thy spirit; is this not also a god,
Chance, and the wheel of all necessities?
Hard things have fallen upon us from harsh gods,
Whom lest worse hap rebuke we not for these.

ALTHÆA

My spirit is strong against itself, and I
For these things' sake cry out on mine own soul
That it endures outrage, and dolorous days,
And life, and this inexpiable impotence.
Weak am I, weak and shameful; my breath drawn
Shames me, and monstrous things and violent gods.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

What shall atone? what heal me? what bring back
Strength to the foot, light to the face? what herb
Assuage me? what restore me? what release?
What strange thing eaten or drunken, O great gods,
Make me as you or as the beasts that feed,
Slay and divide and cherish their own hearts?
For these ye show us; and we less than these
Have not wherewith to live as all these things
Which all their lives fare after their own kind
As who doth well rejoicing; but we ill,
Weeping or laughing, we whom eyesight fails,
Knowledge and light of face and perfect heart,
And hands we lack, and wit; and all our days
Sin, and have hunger, and die infatuated.
For madness have ye given us and not health,
And sins whereof we know not; and for these
Death, and sudden destruction unaware.
What shall we say now? what thing comes of us?

CHORUS

Alas, for all this all men undergo.

ALTHÆA

Wherefore I will not that these twain, O gods,
Die as a dog dies, eaten of creeping things,
Abominable, a loathing; but though dead
Shall they have honour and such funereal flame
As strews men's ashes in their enemies' face
And blinds their eyes who hate them: lest men say,
"Lo how they lie, and living had great kin,
And none of these hath pity of them, and none
Regards them lying, and none is wrung at heart,

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

None moved in spirit for them, naked and slain,
Abhorred, abased, and no tears comfort them:"
And in the dark this grieve Eurythemis,
Hearing how these her sons come down to her
Unburied, unavenged, as kinless men,
And had a queen their sister. That were shame
Worse than this grief. Yet how to atone at all
I know not; seeing the love of my born son,
A new-made mother's new-born love, that grows
From the soft child to the strong man, now soft
Now strong as either, and still one sole same love,
Strives with me, no light thing to strive withal;
This love is deep, and natural to man's blood,
And ineffaceable with many tears.
Yet shall not these rebuke me though I die,
Nor she in that waste world with all her dead,
My mother, among the pale flocks fallen as leaves,
Folds of dead people, and alien from the sun;
Nor lack some bitter comfort, some poor praise,
Being queen, to have borne her daughter like a
queen,
Righteous; and though mine own fire burn me too,
She shall have honour and these her sons, though
dead.
But all the gods will, all they do, and we
Not all we would, yet somewhat; and one choice
We have, to live and do just deeds and die.

CHORUS

Terrible words she communes with, and turns
Swift fiery eyes in doubt against herself,
And murmurs as who talks in dreams with death.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

ALTHÆA

For the unjust also dieth, and him all men
Hate, and himself abhors the unrighteousness,
And seeth his own dishonour intolerable.
But I being just, doing right upon myself,
Slay mine own soul, and no man born shames me.
For none constrains nor shall rebuke, being done,
What none compelled me doing; thus these things
fare.

Ah, ah, that such things should so fare; ah me,
That I am found to do them and endure,
Chosen and constrained to choose, and bear myself
Mine own wound through mine own flesh to the
heart

Violently stricken, a spoiler and a spoil,
A ruin ruinous, fallen on mine own son.
Ah, ah, for me too as for these; alas,
For that is done that shall be, and mine hand
Full of the deed, and full of blood mine eyes,
That shall see never nor touch anything
Save blood unstanch'd and fire unquenchable.

CHORUS

What wilt thou do? what ails thee? for the house
Shakes ruinously; wilt thou bring fire for it?

I

ALTHÆA

Fire in the roofs, and on the lintels fire.
Lo ye, who stand and weave, between the doors,
There; and blood drips from hand and thread, and
stains

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Threshold and raiment and me passing in
Flecked with the sudden sanguine drops of death.

CHORUS

Alas that time is stronger than strong men,
Fate than all gods: and these are fallen on us.

ALTHÆA

A little since and I was glad; and now
I never shall be glad or sad again.

CHORUS

Between two joys a grief grows unaware.

ALTHÆA

A little while and I shall laugh; and then
I shall weep never and laugh not any more.

CHORUS

What shall be said? for words are thorns to grief.
Withhold thyself a little and fear the gods.

ALTHÆA

Fear died when these were slain; and I am as dead,
And fear is of the living; these fear none.

CHORUS

Have pity upon all people for their sake.

ALTHÆA

It is done now; shall I put back my day?

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

CHORUS

An end is come, an end; this is of God.

ALTHÆA

I am fire, and burn myself; keep clear of fire.

CHORUS

The house is broken, is broken; it shall not stand.

ALTHÆA

Woe, woe for him that breaketh; and a rod
Smote it of old, and now the axe is here.

CHORUS

Not as with sundering of the earth
Nor as with cleaving of the sea
Nor fierce foreshadowings of a birth
Nor flying dreams of death to be
Nor loosening of the large world's girth
And quickening of the body of night,
And sound of thunder in men's ears
And fire of lightning in men's sight,
Fate, mother of desires and fears,
Bore unto men the law of tears;
But sudden, an unfathered flame,
And broken out of night, she shone,
She, without body, without name,
In days forgotten and foregone;
And heaven rang round her as she came
Like smitten cymbals, and lay bare;
Clouds and great stars, thunders and snows,

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

The blue sad fields and folds of air,
The life that breathes, the life that grows,
All wind, all fire, that burns or blows,
Even all these knew her: for she is great;
The daughter of doom, the mother of death,
The sister of sorrow; a lifelong weight
That no man's finger lighteneth,
Nor any god can lighten fate;
A landmark seen across the way
Where one race treads as the other trod;
An evil sceptre, an evil stay,
Wrought for a staff, wrought for a rod,
The bitter jealousy of God.

For death is deep as the sea,
And fate as the waves thereof.
Shall the waves take pity on thee
Or the southwind offer thee love?
Wilt thou take the night for thy day
Or the darkness for light on thy way,
Till thou say in thine heart Enough?
Behold, thou art over fair, thou art over wise;
The sweetness of spring in thine hair, and the light
in thine eyes.
The light of the spring in thine eyes, and the sound
in thine ears;
Yet thine heart shall wax heavy with sighs and thine
eyelids with tears.
Wilt thou cover thine hair with gold, and with silver
thy feet?
Hast thou taken the purple to fold thee, and made
thy mouth sweet?

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Behold, when thy face is made bare, he that loved
thee shall hate;

Thy face shall be no more fair at the fall of thy fate.
For thy life shall fall as a leaf and be shed as the rain;
And the veil of thine head shall be grief; and the
crown shall be pain.

ALTHÆA

Ho, ye that wail, and ye that sing, make way
Till I be come among you. Hide your tears,
Ye little weepers, and your laughing lips,
Ye laughers for a little; lo mine eyes
That outweep heaven at rainiest, and my mouth
That laughs as gods laugh at us. Fate's are we,
Yet fate is ours a breathing-space; yea, mine,
Fate is made mine for ever; he is my son,
My bedfellow, my brother. You strong gods,
Give place unto me; I am as any of you,
To give life and to take life. Thou, old earth,
That hast made man and unmade; thou whose mouth
Looks red from the eaten fruits of thine own womb;
Behold me with what lips upon what food
I feed and fill my body; even with flesh
Made of my body. Lo, the fire I lit
I burn with fire to quench it; yea, with flame
I burn up even the dust and ash thereof.

↓

CHORUS

Woman, what fire is this thou burnest with?

ALTHÆA

Yea to the bone, yea to the blood and all.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

CHORUS

For this thy face and hair are as one fire.

ALTHÆA

A tongue that licks and beats upon the dust.

CHORUS

And in thine eyes are hollow light and heat.

ALTHÆA

Of flame not fed with hand or frankincense.

CHORUS

I fear thee for the trembling of thine eyes.

ALTHÆA

Neither with love they tremble nor for fear.

CHORUS

And thy mouth shuddering like a shot bird.

ALTHÆA

Not as the bride's mouth when man kisses it.

CHORUS

Nay, but what thing is this thing thou hast done?

ALTHÆA

Look, I am silent, speak your eyes for me.

CHORUS

I see a faint fire lightening from the hall.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

ALTHÆA

Gaze, stretch your eyes, strain till the lids drop off.

CHORUS

Flushed pillars down the flickering vestibule.

ALTHÆA

Stretch with your necks like birds: cry, chirp as they.

CHORUS

And a long brand that blackens: and white dust.

ALTHÆA

O children, what is this ye see? your eyes
Are blinder than night's face at fall of moon.
That is my son, my flesh, my fruit of life,
My travail, and the year's weight of my womb,
Meleager, a fire enkindled of mine hands
And of mine hands extinguished; this is he.

CHORUS

O gods, what word has flown out at thy mouth?

ALTHÆA

I did this and I say this and I die.

CHORUS

Death stands upon the doorway of thy lips,
And in thy mouth has death set up his house.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

ALTHÆA

O death, a little, a little while, sweet death,
Until I see the brand burnt down and die.

CHORUS

She reels as any reed under the wind,
And cleaves unto the ground with staggering feet.

ALTHÆA

Girls, one thing will I say and hold my peace.
I that did this will weep not nor cry out,
Cry ye and weep: I will not call on gods,
Call ye on them; I will not pity man,
Shew ye your pity. I know not if I live;
Save that I feel the fire upon my face
And on my cheek the burning of a brand.
Yea the smoke bites me, yea I drink the steam
With nostril and with eyelid and with lip
Insatiate and intolerant; and mine hands
Burn, and fire feeds upon mine eyes; I reel
As one made drunk with living, whence he draws
Drunken delight; yet I, though mad for joy,
Loathe my long living and am waxen red
As with the shadow of shed blood; behold,
I am kindled with the flames that fade in him,
I am swollen with subsiding of his veins,
I am flooded with his ebbing; my lit eyes
Flame with the falling fire that leaves his lids
Bloodless; my cheek is luminous with blood
Because his face is ashen. Yet, O child,
Son, first-born, fairest—O sweet mouth, sweet eyes,

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

That drew my life out through my suckling breast,
That shone and clove mine heart through—O soft
knees

Clinging, O tender treadings of soft feet,
Cheeks warm with little kissings—O child, child,
What have we made each other? Lo, I felt
Thy weight cleave to me, a burden of beauty, O
son,

Thy cradled brows and loveliest loving lips,
The floral hair, the little lightening eyes,
And all thy goodly glory; with mine hands
Delicately I fed thee, with my tongue
Tenderly spake, saying, Verily in God's time,
For all the little likeness of thy limbs,
Son, I shall make thee a kingly man to fight,
A lordly leader; and hear before I die,
"She bore the goodliest sword of all the world."
Oh! oh! For all my life turns round on me;
I am severed from myself, my name is gone,
My name that was a healing, it is changed,
My name is a consuming. From this time,
Though mine eyes reach to the end of all these things
My lips shall not unfasten till I die.

SEMICHORUS

She has filled with sighing the city,
And the ways thereof with tears;
She arose, she girdled her sides,
She set her face as a bride's;
She wept, and she had no pity;
Trembled, and felt no fears.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

SEMICHORUS

Her eyes were clear as the sun,
Her brows were fresh as the day;
She girdled herself with gold,
Her robes were manifold;
But the days of her worship are done,
Her praise is taken away.

SEMICHORUS

For she set her hand to the fire,
With her mouth she kindled the same;
As the mouth of a flute-player,
So was the mouth of her;
With the might of her strong desire
She blew the breath of the flame.

SEMICHORUS

She set her hand to the wood,
She took the fire in her hand;
As one who is nigh to death,
She panted with strange breath;
She opened her lips unto blood,
She breathed and kindled the brand.

SEMICHORUS

As a wood-dove newly shot,
She sobbed and lifted her breast;
She sighed and covered her eyes,
Filling her lips with sighs;
She sighed, she withdrew herself not,
She refrained not, taking not rest;

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

SEMICHORUS

But as the wind which is drouth,
And as the air which is death,
As storm that severeth ships,
Her breath severing her lips,
The breath came forth of her mouth
And the fire came forth of her breath.

SECOND MESSENGER

Queen, and you maidens, there is come on us
A thing more deadly than the face of death;
Meleager the good lord is as one slain.

SEMICHORUS

Without sword, without sword is he stricken;
Slain, and slain without hand.

SECOND MESSENGER

For as keen ice divided of the sun
His limbs divide, and as thawed snow the flesh
Thaws from off all his body to the hair.

SEMICHORUS

He wastes as the embers quicken;
With the brand he fades as a brand.

SECOND MESSENGER

Even while they sang and all drew hither and he
Lifted both hands to crown the Arcadian's hair
And fix the looser leaves, both hands fell down.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

SEMICHORUS

With rending of cheek and of hair
Lament ye, mourn for him, weep

SECOND MESSENGER

Straightway the crown slid off and smote on earth,
First fallen; and he, grasping his own hair, groaned
And cast his raiment round his face and fell.

SEMICHORUS

Alas for visions that were,
And soothsayings spoken in sleep.

SECOND MESSENGER

But the king twitched his reins in and leapt down
And caught him, crying out twice "O child" and
thrice,
So that men's eyelids thickened with their tears.

SEMICHORUS

Lament with a long lamentation,
Cry, for an end is at hand.

SECOND MESSENGER

O son, he said, son, lift thine eyes, draw breath,
Pity me; but Meleager with sharp lips
Gasped, and his face waxed like as sunburnt grass.

SEMICHORUS

Cry aloud, O thou kingdom, O nation,
O stricken, a ruinous land.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

SECOND MESSENGER

Whereat king Ceneus, straightening feeble knees,
With feeble hands heaved up a lessening weight,
And laid him sadly in strange hands, and wept.

SEMICHORUS

Thou art smitten, her lord, her desire,
Thy dear blood wasted as rain.

SECOND MESSENGER

And they with tears and rendings of the beard
Bear hither a breathing body, wept upon
And lightening at each footfall, sick to death.

SEMICHORUS

Thou madest thy sword as a fire,
With fire for a sword thou art slain.

SECOND MESSENGER

And lo, the feast turned funeral, and the crowns
Fallen; and the huntress and the hunter trapped;
And weeping and changed faces and veiled hair.

MELEAGER

Let your hands meet
Round the weight of my head;
Lift ye my feet
As the feet of the dead;
For the flesh of my body is molten, the limbs of it
molten as lead.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

CHORUS

O thy luminous face,
Thine imperious eyes!
O the grief, O the grace,
As of day when it dies!
Who is this bending over thee, lord, with tears and
suppression of sighs?

MELEAGER

Is a bride so fair?
Is a maid so meek?
With unchapleted hair,
With unfileted cheek,
Atalanta, the pure among women, whose name is as
blessing to speak.

ATALANTA

I would that with feet
Unsandalled, unshod,
Overbold, overfleet,
I had swum not nor trod
From Arcadia to Calydon northward, a blast of the
envy of God.

MELEAGER

Unto each man his fate;
Unto each as he saith
In whose fingers the weight
Of the world is as breath;
Yet I would that in clamour of battle mine hands
had laid hold upon death.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

CHORUS

Not with cleaving of shields
And their clash in thine ear,
When the lord of fought fields
Breaketh spearshaft from spear,
Thou art broken, our lord, thou art broken, with
travail and labour and fear.

MELEAGER

Would God he had found me
Beneath fresh boughs!
Would God he had bound me
Unawares in mine house,
With light in mine eyes, and songs in my lips, and a
crown on my brows!

CHORUS

Whence art thou sent from us?
Whither thy goal?
How art thou rent from us,
Thou that wert whole,
As with severing of eyelids and eyes, as with sunder-
ing of body and soul!

MELEAGER

My heart is within me
As an ash in the fire;
Whosoever hath seen me,
Without lute, without lyre,
Shall sing of me grievous things, even things that
were ill to desire.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

CHORUS

Who shall raise thee
From the house of the dead?
Or what man praise thee
That thy praise may be said?
Alas thy beauty! alas thy body! alas thine head!

MELEAGER

But thou, O mother,
The dreamer of dreams,
Wilt thou bring forth another
To feel the sun's beams
When I move among shadows a shadow, and wail
by impassable streams?

GENEUS

What thing wilt thou leave me
Now this thing is done?
A man wilt thou give me,
A son for my son,
For the light of mine eyes, the desire of my life, the
desirable one?

CHORUS

Thou wert glad above others,
Yea, fair beyond word;
Thou wert glad among mothers;
For each man that heard
Of thee, praise there was added unto thee, as wings
to the feet of a bird.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

GENEUS

Who shall give back
Thy face of old years
With travail made black,
Grown grey among fears,
Mother of sorrow, mother of cursing, mother of
tears?

MELEAGER

Though thou art as fire
Fed with fuel in vain,
My delight, my desire,
Is more chaste than the rain,
More pure than the dewfall, more holy than stars
are that live without stain.

ATALANTA

I would that as water
My life's blood had thawed,
Or as winter's wan daughter
Leaves lowland and lawn
Spring-stricken, or ever mine eyes had beheld thee
made dark in thy dawn.

CHORUS

When thou dravest the men
Of the chosen of Thrace,
None turned him again
Nor endured he thy face
Clothed round with the blush of the battle, with
light from a terrible place.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

GENEUS

Thou shouldst die as he dies
For whom none sheddeth tears;
Filling thine eyes
And fulfilling thine ears
With the brilliance of battle, the bloom and the
beauty, the splendour of spears.

CHORUS

In the ears of the world
It is sung, it is told,
And the light thereof hurled
And the noise thereof rolled
From the Acroceraunian snow to the ford of the
fleece of gold.

MELEAGER

Would God ye could carry me
Forth of all these;
Heap sand and bury me
By the Chersonese
Where the thundering Bosphorus answers the
thunder of Pontic seas.

GENEUS

Dost thou mock at our praise
And the singing begun
And the men of strange days
Praising my son
In the folds of the hills of home, high places of
Calydon?

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

MELEAGER

For the dead man no home is;
Ah, better to be
What the flower of the foam is
In fields of the sea,
That the sea-waves might be as my raiment, the
gulf-stream a garment for me.

CHORUS

Who shall seek thee and bring
And restore thee thy day,
When the dove dipt her wing
And the oars won their way
Where the narrowing Symplegades whitened the
straits of Propontis with spray?

MELEAGER

Will ye crown me my tomb
Or exalt me my name,
Now my spirits consume,
Now my flesh is a flame?
Let the sea slake it once, and men speak of me sleep-
ing to praise me or shame.

CHORUS

Turn back now, turn thee,
As who turns him to wake;
Though the life in thee burn thee,
Couldst thou bathe it and slake
Where the sea-ridge of Helle hangs heavier, and
east upon west waters break?

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

MELEAGER

Would the winds blow me back
Or the waves hurl me home?
Ah, to touch in the track
Where the pine learnt to roam
Cold girdles and crowns of the sea-gods, cool
blossoms of water and foam!

CHORUS

The gods may release
That they made fast;
Thy soul shall have ease
In thy limbs at the last;
But what shall they give thee for life, sweet life that
is overpast?

MELEAGER

Not the life of men's veins,
Not of flesh that conceives;
But the grace that remains,
The fair beauty that cleaves
To the life of the rains in the grasses, the life of the
dews on the leaves.

CHORUS

Thou wert helmsman and chief;
Wilt thou turn in an hour,
Thy limbs to the leaf,
Thy face to the flower,
Thy blood to the water, thy soul to the gods who
divide and devour?

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

MELEAGER

The years are hungry,
They wail all their days;
The gods wax angry
And weary of praise;
And who shall bridle their lips? and who shall
straiten their ways?

CHORUS

The gods guard over us
With sword and with rod;
Weaving shadow to cover us,
Heaping the sod,
That law may fulfil herself wholly, to darken man's
face before God.

MELEAGER

O holy head of Æneus, lo thy son
Guiltless, yet red from alien guilt, yet foul
With kinship of contaminated lives,
Lo, for their blood I die; and mine own blood
For bloodshedding of mine is mixed therewith,
That death may not discern me from my kin.
Yet with clean heart I die and faultless hand,
Not shamefully; thou therefore of thy love
Salute me, and bid fare among the dead
Well, as the dead fare; for the best man dead
Fares sadly; nathless I now faring well
Pass without fear where nothing is to fear
Having thy love about me and thy goodwill,
O father, among dark places and men dead.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

GENEUS

Child, I salute thee with sad heart and tears,
And bid thee comfort, being a perfect man
In fight, and honourable in the house of peace.
The gods give thee fair wage and dues of death,
And me brief days and ways to come at thee.

MELEAGER

Pray thou thy days be long before thy death,
And full of ease and kingdom; seeing in death
There is no comfort and none aftergrowth,
Nor shall one thence look up and see day's dawn
Nor light upon the land whither I go.
Live thou and take thy fill of days and die
When thy day comes; and make not much of death
Lest ere thy day thou reap an evil thing.
Thou too, the bitter mother and mother-plague
Of this my weary body—thou too, queen,
The source and end, the sower and the scythe,
The rain that ripens and the drought that slays,
The sand that swallows and the spring that feeds,
To make me and unmake me—thou, I say,
Althæa, since my father's ploughshare, drawn
Through fatal seedland of a female field,
Furrowed thy body, whence a wheaten ear
Strong from the sun and fragrant from the rains
I sprang and cleft the closure of thy womb,
Mother, I dying with unforgetful tongue
Hail thee as holy and worship thee as just
Who art unjust and unholy; and with my knees
Would worship, but thy fire and subtlety,
Dissundering them, devour me; for these limbs

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Are as light dust and crumbings from mine urn
Before the fire has touched them; and my face
As a dead leaf or dead foot's mark on snow,
And all this body a broken barren tree
That was so strong, and all this flower of life
Disbranched and desecrated miserably,
And minished all that god-like muscle and might
And lesser than a man's: for all my veins
Fail me, and all mine ashen life burns down.
I would thou hadst let me live; but gods averse,
But fortune, and the fiery feet of change,
And time, these would not, these tread out my life,
These and not thou; me too thou hast loved, and I
Thee; but this death was mixed with all my life,
Mine end with my beginning: and this law,
This only, slays me, and not my mother at all.
And let no brother or sister grieve too sore,
Nor melt their hearts out on me with their tears,
Since extreme love and sorrowing overmuch
Vex the great gods, and overloving men
Slay and are slain for love's sake; and this house
Shall bear much better children; why should these
Weep? but in patience let them live their lives
And mine pass by forgotten: thou alone,
Mother, thou sole and only, thou not these,
Keep me in mind a little when I die
Because I was thy first-born; let thy soul
Pity me, pity even me gone hence and dead,
Though thou wert wroth, and though thou bear again
Much happier sons, and all men later born
Exceedingly excel me; yet do thou
Forget not, nor think shame; I was thy son.

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

Time was I did not shame thee; and time was
I thought to live and make thee honourable
With deeds as great as these men's; but they live,
These, and I die; and what thing should have been
Surely I know not; yet I charge thee, seeing
I am dead already, love me not the less,
Me, O my mother; I charge thee by these gods,
My father's, and that holier breast of thine,
By these that see me dying, and that which nursed,
Love me not less, thy first-born: though grief come,
Grief only, of me, and of all these great joy,
And shall come always to thee; for thou knowest,
O mother, O breasts that bare me, for ye know,
O sweet head of my mother, sacred eyes,
Ye know my soul albeit I sinned, ye know
Albeit I kneel not neither touch thy knees,
But with my lips I kneel, and with my heart
I fall about thy feet and worship thee.
And ye farewell now, all my friends; and ye,
Kinsmen, much younger and glorious more than I,
Sons of my mother's sister; and all farewell
That were in Colchis with me, and bare down
The waves and wars that met us: and though times
Change, and though now I be not anything,
Forget not me among you, what I did
In my good time; for even by all those days,
Those days and this, and your own living souls,
And by the light and luck of you that live,
And by this miserable spoil, and me
Dying, I beseech you, let my name not die.
But thou, dear, touch me with thy rose-like hands,
And fasten up mine eyelids with thy mouth,

ATALANTA IN CALYDON

A bitter kiss; and grasp me with thine arms,
Printing with heavy lips my light waste flesh,
Made light and thin by heavy-handed fate,
And with thine holy maiden eyes drop dew,
Drop tears for dew upon me who am dead,
Me who have loved thee; seeing without sin done
I am gone down to the empty weary house
Where no flesh is nor beauty nor swift eyes
Nor sound of mouth nor might of hands and feet.
But thou, dear, hide my body with thy veil,
And with thy raiment cover foot and head,
And stretch thyself upon me and touch hands
With hands and lips with lips; be pitiful
As thou art maiden perfect; let no man
Defile me to despise me, saying, This man
Died woman-wise, a woman's offering, slain
Through female fingers in his woof of life,
Dishonourable; for thou hast honoured me.
And now for God's sake kiss me once and twice
And let me go; for the night gathers me,
And in the night shall no man gather fruit.

ATALANTA

Hail thou: but I with heavy face and feet
Turn homeward and am gone out of thine eyes.

CHORUS

Who shall contend with his lords
Or cross them or do them wrong?
Who shall bind them as with cords?
Who shall tame them as with song?
Who shall smite them as with swords?
For the hands of their kingdom are strong.

ERECHTHEUS

A TRAGEDY

ὦ τὰι λιπαραὶ καὶ ἰοστέφανοι καὶ ἀοίδιμοι,
Ἑλλάδος ἔρεισμα, κλειναὶ Ἀθᾶναι, δαιμόνιον πτολίεθρον.

PIND. *Fr.* 47.

AT. τίς δὲ ποιμάνωρ ἔπεστι κάπιδеспόζει στρατοῦ;

XO. οὐτινος δοῦλοι κέκληνται φωτὸς οὐδ' ὑπηκόοι.

ÆSCH. *Pers.* 241-2.

TO
MY MOTHER

PERSONS

ERECHTHEUS.

CHORUS OF ATHENIAN ELDERS.

PRAXITHEA.

CHTHONIA.

HERALD OF EUMOLPUS.

MESSENGER.

ATHENIAN HERALD.

ATHENA.

ERECHTHEUS

ERECHTHEUS

MOTHER of life and death and all men's days,
Earth, whom I chief of all men born would bless,
And call thee with more loving lips than theirs
Mother, for of this very body of thine
And living blood I have my breath and live,
Behold me, even thy son, me crowned of men,
Me made thy child by that strong cunning God
Who fashions fire and iron, who begat
Me for a sword and beacon-fire on thee,
Me fosterling of Pallas, in her shade
Reared, that I first might pay the nursing debt,
Hallowing her fame with flower of third-year feasts,
And first bow down the bridled strength of steeds
To lose the wild wont of their birth, and bear
Clasp of man's knees and steerage of his hand,
Or fourfold service of his fire-swift wheels
That whirl the four-yoked chariot; me the king
Who stand before thee naked now, and cry,
O holy and general mother of all men born,
But mother most and motherliest of mine,
Earth, for I ask thee rather of all the Gods,
What have we done? what word mistimed or work
Hath winged the wild feet of this timeless curse

ERECHTHEUS

To fall as fire upon us? Lo, I stand
Here on this brow's crown of the city's head
That crowns its lovely body, till death's hour
Waste it; but now the dew of dawn and birth
Is fresh upon it from thy womb, and we
Behold it born how beauteous; one day more
I see the world's wheel of the circling sun
Roll up rejoicing to regard on earth
This one thing goodliest, fair as heaven or he,
Worth a God's gaze or strife of Gods; but now
Would this day's ebb of their spent wave of strife
Sweep it to sea, wash it on wreck, and leave
A costless thing contemned; and in our stead,
Where these walls were and sounding streets of men,
Make wide a waste for tongueless water-herds
And spoil of ravening fishes; that no more
Should men say, Here was Athens. This shalt thou
Sustain not, nor thy son endure to see,
Nor thou to live and look on; for the womb
Bare me not base that bare me miserable,
To hear this loud brood of the Thracian foam
Break its broad strength of billowy-beating war
Here, and upon it as a blast of death
Blowing, the keen wrath of a fire-souled king,
A strange growth grafted on our natural soil,
A root of Thrace in Eleusinian earth
Set for no comfort to the kindly land,
Son of the sea's lord and our first-born foe,
Eumolpus; nothing sweet in ears of thine
The music of his making, nor a song
Toward hopes of ours auspicious; for the note
Rings as for death oracular to thy sons

ERECHTHEUS

That goes before him on the sea-wind blown
Full of this charge laid on me, to put out
The brief light kindled of mine own child's life,
Or with this helmsman hand that steers the state
Run right on the under shoal and ridge of death
The populous ship with all its fraughtage gone
And sails that were to take the wind of time
Rent, and the tackling that should hold out fast
In confluent surge of loud calamities
Broken, with spars of rudders and lost oars
That were to row toward harbour and find rest
In some most glorious haven of all the world
And else may never near it: such a song
The Gods have set his lips on fire withal
Who threatens now in all their names to bring
Ruin; but none of these, thou knowest, have I
Chid with my tongue or cursed at heart for grief,
Knowing how the soul runs reinless on sheer death,
Whose grief or joy takes part against the Gods.
And what they will is more than our desire,
And their desire is more than what we will.
For no man's will and no desire of man's
Shall stand as doth a God's will. Yet, O fair
Mother, that seest me how I cast no word
Against them, plead no reason, crave no cause,
Boast me not blameless, nor bewEEP me wronged,
By this fair wreath of towers we have decked thee
with,
This chaplet that we give thee woven of walls,
This girdle of gate and temple and citadel
Drawn round beneath thy bosom, and fast linked
As to thine heart's root—this dear crown of thine,

ERECHTHEUS

This present light, this city—be not thou
Slow to take heed nor slack to strengthen her,
Fare we so short-lived howsoe'er, and pay
What price we may to ransom thee thy town,
Not me my life; but thou that diest not, thou,
Though all our house die for this people's sake,
Keep thou for ours thy crown our city, guard
And give it life the lovelier that we died.

CHORUS

Sun, that hast lightened and loosed by thy might
Ocean and Earth from the lordship of night,
Quickening with vision his eye that was veiled,
Freshening the force in her heart that had failed,
That sister fettered and blinded brother
Should have sight by thy grace and delight of each
other,

Behold now and see

What profit is given them of thee;
What wrath has enkindled with madness of mind
Her limbs that were bounden, his face that was
blind,

To be locked as in wrestle together, and lighten
With fire that shall darken thy fire in the sky,
Body to body and eye against eye

In a war against kind,

Till the bloom of her fields and her high hills whiten

With the foam of his waves more high.

For the sea-marks set to divide of old

The kingdoms to Ocean and Earth assigned,
The hoar sea-fields from the cornfields' gold,

ERECHTHEUS

His wine-bright waves from her vineyards' fold,
 Frail forces we find
To bridle the spirit of Gods or bind
 Till the heat of their hearts wax cold.
But the peace that was stablished between them to
 stand

Is rent now in twain by the strength of his hand
Who stirs up the storm of his sons overbold
To pluck from fight what he lost of right,
By council and judgment of Gods that spake
And gave great Pallas the strife's fair stake,
The lordship and love of the lovely land,
The grace of the town that hath on it for crown
 But a headband to wear

Of violets one-hued with her hair:
For the vales and the green high places of earth
 Hold nothing so fair,

And the depths of the sea bear no such birth
 Of the manifold births they bear.

Too well, too well was the great stake worth
A strife divine for the Gods to judge,
A crowned God's triumph, a foiled God's grudge,
Though the loser be strong and the victress wise
Who played long since for so large a prize,
The fruitful immortal anointed adored
Dear city of men without master or lord,
Fair fortress and fostress of sons born free,
Who stand in her sight and in thine, O sun,
Slaves of no man, subjects of none;
A wonder enthroned on the hills and sea,
A maiden crowned with a fourfold glory
That none from the pride of her head may rend,

ERECHTHEUS

Violet and olive-leaf purple and hoary,
Song-wreath and story the fairest of fame,
Flowers that the winter can blast not or bend;
A light upon earth as the sun's own flame,
A name as his name,
Athens, a praise without end.

A noise is arisen against us of waters, [Str. 1.
A sound as of battle come up from the sea.
Strange hunters are hard on us, hearts without pity;
They have staked their nets round the fair young
city,
That the sons of her strength and her virgin
daughters
Should find not whither alive to flee.
And we know not yet of the word unwritten,

[*Ant.* 1.]

The doom of the Pythian we have not heard;
From the navel of earth and the veiled mid altar
We wait for a token with hopes that falter,
With fears that hang on our hearts thought-
smitten

Lest her tongue be kindled with no good word.
O thou not born of the womb, nor bred [Str. 2.
In the bride-night's warmth of a changed God's
bed,
But thy life as a lightning was flashed from the light
of thy father's head,
O chief God's child by a motherless birth,
If aught in thy sight we indeed be worth,
Keep death from us thou, that art none of the Gods
of the dead under earth.

ERECHTHEUS

Thou that hast power on us, save, if thou wilt;
[*Ant.* 2.]

Let the blind wave breach not thy wall scarce
built;

But bless us not so as by bloodshed, impute not for
grace to us guilt,

Nor by price of pollution of blood set us free;

Let the hands be taintless that clasp thy knee,

Nor a maiden be slain to redeem for a maiden her
shrine from the sea.

O earth, O sun, turn back [Str. 3.]

Full on his deadly track

Death, that would smite you black and mar your
creatures,

And with one hand disroot

All tender flower and fruit,

With one strike blind and mute the heaven's fair
features,

Pluck out the eyes of morn, and make

Silence in the east and blackness whence the bright
songs break.

Help, earth, help, heaven, that hear [Ant. 3.]

The song-notes of our fear,

Shrewd notes and shrill, not clear or joyful-sound-
ing;

Hear, highest of Gods, and stay

Death on his hunter's way,

Full on his forceless prey his beagles hound-
ing;

Break thou his bow, make short his hand,

Maim his fleet foot whose passage kills the living
land.

ERECHTHEUS

Let a third wave smite not us, father, [Str. 4.
Long since sore smitten of twain,
Lest the house of thy son's son perish
And his name be barren on earth.
Whose race wilt thou comfort rather
If none to thy son remain?
Whose seed wilt thou choose to cherish
If his be cut off in the birth?
For the first fair graft of his grafting [Ant. 4.
Was rent from its maiden root
By the strong swift hand of a lover
Who fills the night with his breath;
On the lip of the stream low-laughing
Her green soft virginal shoot
Was plucked from the stream-side cover
By the grasp of a love like death.
For a God's was the mouth that kissed her [Str. 5.
Who speaks, and the leaves lie dead,
When winter awakes as at warning
To the sound of his foot from Thrace.
Nor happier the bed of her sister
Though Love's self laid her abed
By a bridegroom beloved of the morning
And fair as the dawn's own face.
For Procris, ensnared and ensnaring [Ant. 5.
By the fraud of a twofold wile,
With the point of her own spear stricken
By the gift of her own hand fell.
Oversubtle in doubts, overdaring
In deeds and devices of guile,
And strong to quench as to quicken,
O Love, have we named thee well?

ERECHTHEUS

By thee was the spear's edge whetted [Str. 6.
That laid her dead in the dew,
In the moist green glens of the midland
By her dear lord slain and thee.
And him at the cliff's end fretted
By the grey keen waves, him too,
Thine hand from the white-browed headland
Flung down for a spoil to the sea.
But enough now of griefs grey-growing [Ant. 6.
Have darkened the house divine,
Have flowered on its boughs and faded,
And green is the brave stock yet.
O father all seeing and all knowing,
Let the last fruit fall not of thine
From the tree with whose boughs we are
shaded,
From the stock that thy son's hand set.

ERECHTHEUS

O daughter of Cephisus, from all time
Wise have I found thee, wife and queen, of heart
Perfect; nor in the days that knew not wind
Nor days when storm blew death upon our peace
Was thine heart swoln with seed of pride, or bowed
With blasts of bitter fear that break men's souls
Who lift too high their minds toward heaven, in
thought
Too godlike grown for worship; but of mood
Equal, in good time reverent of time bad,
And glad in ill days of the good that were.
Nor now too would I fear thee, now misdoubt
Lest fate should find thee lesser than thy doom,

ERECHTHEUS

Chosen if thou be to bear and to be great
Haply beyond all women; and the word
Speaks thee divine, dear queen, that speaks thee
 dead,
Dead being alive, or quick and dead in one
Shall not men call thee living? yet I fear
To slay thee timeless with my proper tongue,
With lips, thou knowest, that love thee; and such
 work
Was never laid of Gods on men, such word
No mouth of man learnt ever, as from mine
Most loth to speak thine ear most loth shall take
And hold it hateful as the grave to hear.

PRAXITHEA

That word there is not in all speech of man,
King, that being spoken of the Gods and thee
I have not heart to honour, or dare hold
More than I hold thee or the Gods in hate
Hearing; but if my heart abhor it heard
Being insubmissive, hold me not thy wife
But use me like a stranger, whom thine hand
Hath fed by chance and finding thence no thanks
Flung off for shame's sake to forgetfulness.

ERECHTHEUS

O, of what breath shall such a word be made,
Or from what heart find utterance? Would my
 tongue
Were rent forth rather from the quivering root
Than made as fire or poison thus for thee.

ERECHTHEUS

PRAXITHEA

But if thou speak of blood, and I that hear
Be chosen of all for this land's love to die
And save to thee thy city, know this well,
Happiest I hold me of her seed alive.

ERECHTHEUS

O sun that seest, what saying was this of thine,
God, that thy power has breathed into my lips?
For from no sunlit shrine darkling it came.

PRAXITHEA

What portent from the mid oracular place
Hath smitten thee so like a curse that flies
Wingless, to waste men with its plagues? yet speak.

ERECHTHEUS

Thy blood the Gods require not; take this first.

PRAXITHEA

To me than thee more grievous this should sound.

ERECHTHEUS

That word rang truer and bitterer than it knew.

PRAXITHEA

This is not then thy grief, to see me die?

ERECHTHEUS

Die shalt thou not, yet give thy blood to death.

ERECHTHEUS

PRAXITHEA

If this ring worse I know not; strange it rang.

ERECHTHEUS

Alas, thou knowest not; woe is me that know.

PRAXITHEA

And woe shall mine be, knowing; yet halt not here.

ERECHTHEUS

Guiltless of blood this state may stand no more.

PRAXITHEA

Firm let it stand whatever bleed or fall.

ERECHTHEUS

O Gods, that I should say it shall and weep.

PRAXITHEA

Weep, and say this? no tears should bathe such
words.

ERECHTHEUS

Woe's me that I must weep upon them, woe.

PRAXITHEA

What stain is on them for thy tears to cleanse?

ERECHTHEUS

A stain of blood unpurgeable with tears.

ERECHTHEUS

PRAXITHEA

Whence? for thou sayest it is and is not mine.

ERECHTHEUS

Hear then and know why only of all men I
That bring such news as mine is, I alone
Must wash good words with weeping; I and thou,
Woman, must wail to hear men sing, must groan
To see their joy who love us; all our friends
Save only we, and all save we that love
This holiness of Athens, in our sight
Shall lift their hearts up, in our hearing praise
Gods whom we may not; for to these they give
Life of their children, flower of all their seed,
For all their travail fruit, for all their hopes
Harvest; but we for all our good things, we
Have at their hands which fill all these folk full
Death, barrenness, child-slaughter, curses, cares,
Sea-leaguer and land-shipwreck; which of these,
Which wilt thou first give thanks for? all are thine.

PRAXITHEA

What first they give who give this city good,
For that first given to save it I give thanks
First, and thanks heartier from a happier tongue,
More than for any my peculiar grace
Shown me and not my country; next for this,
That none of all these but for all these I
Must bear my burden, and no eye but mine
Weep of all women's in this broad land born
Who see their land's deliverance; but much more,
But most for this I thank them most of all,

ERECHTHEUS

That this their edge of doom is chosen to pierce
My heart and not my country's; for the sword
Drawn to smite there and sharpened for such stroke
Should wound more deep than any turned on me.

CHORUS

Well fares the land that bears such fruit, and well
The spirit that breeds such thought and speech in
man.

ERECHTHEUS

O woman, thou hast shamed my heart with thine,
To show so strong a patience; take then all;
For all shall break not nor bring down thy soul.
The word that journeying to the bright God's shrine
Who speaks askance and darkling, but his name
Hath in it slaying and ruin broad writ out,
I heard, hear thou: thus saith he; There shall die
One soul for all this people; from thy womb
Came forth the seed that here on dry bare ground
Death's hand must sow untimely, to bring forth
Nor blade nor shoot in season, being by name
To the under Gods made holy, who require
For this land's life her death and maiden blood
To save a maiden city. Thus I heard,
And thus with all said leave thee; for save this
No word is left us, and no hope alive.

CHORUS

He hath uttered too surely his wrath not obscurely,
nor wrapt as in mists of his breath, [Str.
The master that lightens not hearts he enlightens,
but gives them foreknowledge of death.

ERECHTHEUS

As a bolt from the cloud hath he sent it aloud and
proclaimed it afar,

From the darkness and height of the horror of
night hath he shown us a star.

Star may I name it and err not, or flame shall
I say,

Born of the womb that was born of the tomb
of the day?

O Night, whom other but thee for mother, and Death
for the father, Night, [Ant.

Shall we dream to discover, save thee and thy lover,
to bring such a sorrow to sight?

From the slumberless bed for thy bedfellow spread
and his bride under earth

Hast thou brought forth a wild and insatiable
child, an unbearable birth.

Fierce are the fangs of his wrath, and the pangs
that they give;

None is there, none that may bear them, not
one that would live.

CHTHONIA

Forth of the fine-spun folds of veils that hide
My virgin chamber toward the full-faced sun
I set my foot not moved of mine own will,
Unmaidenlike, nor with unprompted speed
Turn eyes too broad or doglike unabashed
On reverend heads of men and thence on thine,
Mother, now covered from the light and bowed
As hers who mourns her brethren; but what grief
Bends thy blind head thus earthward, holds thus
mute,

ERECHTHEUS

I know not till thy will be to lift up
Toward mine thy sorrow-muffled eyes and speak;
And till thy will be would I know this not.

PRAXITHEA

Old men and childless, or if sons ye have seen
And daughters, elder-born were these than mine,
Look on this child, how young of years, how sweet,
How scant of time and green of age her life
Puts forth its flower of girlhood; and her gait
How virginal, how soft her speech, her eyes
How seemly smiling; wise should all ye be,
All honourable and kindly men of age;
Now give me counsel and one word to say
That I may bear to speak, and hold my peace
Henceforth for all time even as all ye now.
Dumb are ye all, bowed eyes and tongueless mouths,
Unprofitable; if this were wind that speaks,
As much its breath might move you. Thou then,
child,
Set thy sweet eyes on mine; look through them well;
Take note of all the writing of my face
As of a tablet or a tomb inscribed
That bears me record; lifeless now, my life
Thereon that was think written; brief to read,
Yet shall the scripture sear thine eyes as fire
And leave them dark as dead men's. Nay, dear
child,
Thou hast no skill, my maiden, and no sense
To take such knowledge; sweet is all thy lore,
And all this bitter; yet I charge thee learn
And love and lay this up within thine heart,

ERECHTHEUS

Even this my word; less ill it were to die
Than live and look upon thy mother dead,
Thy mother-land that bare thee; no man slain
But him who hath seen it shall men count unblest,
None blest as him who hath died and seen it not.

CHTHONIA

That sight some God keep from me though I die.

PRAXITHEA

A God from thee shall keep it; fear not this.

CHTHONIA

Thanks all my life long shall he gain of mine.

PRAXITHEA

Short gain of all yet shall he get of thee.

CHTHONIA

Brief be my life, yet so long live my thanks.

PRAXITHEA

So long? so little; how long shall they live?

CHTHONIA

Even while I see the sunlight and thine eyes.

1

PRAXITHEA

Would mine might shut ere thine upon the sun.

CHTHONIA

For me thou prayest unkindly; change that prayer.

ERECHTHEUS

PRAXITHEA

Not well for me thou sayest, and ill for thee.

CHTHONIA

Nay, for me well, if thou shalt live, not I.

PRAXITHEA

How live, and lose these loving looks of thine?

CHTHONIA

It seems I too, thus praying, then, love thee not.

PRAXITHEA

Lov'st thou not life? what wouldst thou do to die?

CHTHONIA

Well, but not more than all things, love I life.

PRAXITHEA

And fain wouldst keep it as thine age allows?

CHTHONIA

Fain would I live, and fain not fear to die.

PRAXITHEA

That I might bid thee die not! Peace; no more.

CHORUS

A godlike race of grief the Gods have set
For these to run matched equal, heart with heart.

ERECHTHEUS

PRAXITHEA

Child of the chief of Gods, and maiden crowned,
Queen of these towers and fostress of their king,
Pallas, and thou my father's holiest head,
A living well of life nor stanch'd nor stained,
O God Cephissus, thee too charge I next,
Be to me judge and witness; nor thine ear
Shall now my tongue invoke not, thou to me
Most hateful of things holy, mournfullest
Of all old sacred streams that wash the world,
Ilissus, on whose marge at flowery play
A whirlwind-footed bridegroom found my child
And rapt her northward where mine elder-born
Keeps now the Thracian bride-bed of a God
Intolerable to seamen, but this land
Finds him in hope for her sake favourable,
A gracious son by wedlock; hear me then
Thou likewise, if with no faint heart or false
The word I say be said, the gift be given,
Which might I choose I had rather die than give
Or speak and die not. Ere thy limbs were made
Or thine eyes lightened, strife, thou knowest, my
child,
'Twixt God and God had risen, which heavenlier
name
Should, here stand hallowed, whose more liberal
grace
Should win this city's worship, and our land
To which of these do reverence; first the lord
Whose wheels make lightnings of the foam-flowered
sea

ERECHTHEUS

Here on this rock, whose height brow-bound with
dawn

Is head and heart of Athens, one sheer blow
Struck, and beneath the triple wound that shook
The stony sinews and stark roots of the earth
Sprang toward the sun a sharp salt fount, and sank
Where lying it lights the heart up of the hill,
A well of bright strange brine; but she that reared
Thy father with her same chaste fostering hand
Set for a sign against it in our guard
The holy bloom of the olive, whose hoar leaf
High in the shadowy shrine of Pandrosus
Hath honour of us all; and of this strife
The twelve most high Gods judging with one mouth
Acclaimed her victress; wroth whereat, as wronged
That she should hold from him such prize and place,
The strong king of the tempest-rifted sea
Loosed reinless on the low Thriasian plain
The thunders of his chariots, swallowing stunned
Earth, beasts, and men, the whole blind foundering
world

That was the sun's at morning, and ere noon
Death's; nor this only prey fulfilled his mind;
For with strange crook-toothed prows of Carian folk
Who snatch a sanguine life out of the sea,
Thieves keen to pluck their bloody fruit of spoil
From the grey fruitless waters, has their God
Furrowed our shores to waste them, as the fields
Were landward harried from the north with swords
Aonian, sickles of man-slaughtering edge
Ground for no hopeful harvest of live grain
Against us in Bœotia; these being spent,

ERECHTHEUS

Now this third time his wind of wrath has blown
Right on this people a mightier wave of war,
Three times more huge a ruin; such its ridge
Foam-rimmed and hollow like the womb of heaven,
But black for shining, and with death for life
Big now to birth and ripe with child, full-blown
With fear and fruit of havoc, takes the sun
Out of our eyes, darkening the day, and blinds
The fair sky's face unseasonably with change,
A cloud in one and billow of battle, a surge
High reared as heaven with monstrous surf of
spears

That shake on us their shadow, till men's heads
Bend, and their hearts even with its forward wind
Wither, so blasts all seed in them of hope
Its breath and blight of presage; yea, even now
The winter of this wind out of the deeps
Makes cold our trust in comfort of the Gods
And blind our eye toward outlook; yet not here,
Here never shall the Thracian plant on high
For ours his father's symbol, nor with wreaths
A strange folk wreathe it upright set and crowned
Here where our natural people born behold
The golden Gorgon of the shield's defence
That screens their flowering olive, nor strange Gods
Be graced, and Pallas here have praise no more.
And if this be not I must give my child,
Thee, mine own very blood and spirit of mine,
Thee to be slain. Turn from me, turn thine eyes
A little from me; I can bear not yet
To see if still they smile on mine or no,
If fear make faint the light in them, or faith

ERECHTHEUS

Fix them as stars of safety. Need have we,
Sore need of stars that set not in mid storm,
Lights that outlast the lightnings; yet my heart
Endures not to make proof of thine or these,
Not yet to know thee whom I made, and bare
What manner of woman; had I borne thee man,
I had made no question of thine eyes or heart,
Nor spared to read the scriptures in them writ,
Wert thou my son; yet couldst thou then but die
Fallen in sheer fight by chance and charge of spears
And have no more of memory, fill no tomb
More famous than thy fellows in fair field,
Where many share the grave, many the praise;
But one crown shall one only girl my child
Wear, dead for this dear city, and give back life
To him that gave her and to me that bare,
And save two sisters living; and all this,
Is this not all good? I shall give thee, child,
Thee but by fleshly nature mine, to bleed
For dear land's love; but if the city fall
What part is left me in my children then?
But if it stand and thou for it lie dead,
Then hast thou in it a better part than we,
A holier portion than we all; for each
Hath but the length of his own life to live,
And this most glorious mother-land on earth
To worship till that life have end; but thine
Hath end no more than hers; thou, dead, shalt live
Till Athens live not; for the days and nights
Given of thy bare brief dark dividual life,
Shall she give thee half all her agelong own
And all its glory; for thou givest her these;

ERECHTHEUS

But with one hand she takes and gives again
More than I gave or she requires of thee.
Come therefore, I will make thee fit for death,
I that could give thee, dear, no gift at birth
Save of light life that breathes and bleeds, even I
Will help thee to this better gift than mine
And lead thee by this little living hand
That death shall make so strong, to that great
end

Whence it shall lighten like a God's, and strike
Dead the strong heart of battle that would break
Athens; but ye, pray for this land, old men,
That it may bring forth never child on earth
To love it less, for none may more, than we.

CHORUS

Out of the north wind grief came forth, [Str. 1.
And the shining of a sword out of the sea.
Yea, of old the first-blown blast blew the prelude
of this last,

The blast of his trumpet upon Rhodope.
Out of the north skies full of his cloud,
With the clamour of his storms as of a crowd
At the wheels of a great king crying aloud,
At the axle of a strong king's car
That has girded on the girdle of war—
With hands that lightened the skies in sunder
And feet whose fall was followed of thunder,
A God, a great God strange of name,
With horse-yoke fleeter-hoofed than flame,
To the mountain bed of a maiden came,

ERECHTHEUS

Oreithyia, the bride mismated,
Wofully wed in a snow-strewn bed
With a bridegroom that kisses the bride's mouth
dead;

Without garland, without glory, without song,
As a fawn by night on the hills belated,
Given over for a spoil unto the strong.

From lips how pale so keen a wail [Ant. 1.

At the grasp of a God's hand on her she gave,
When his breath that darkens air made a havoc
of her hair,

It rang from the mountain even to the wave;
Rang with a cry, *Woe's me, woe is me!*
From the darkness upon Hæmus to the sea:
And with hands that clung to her new lord's knee;
As a virgin overborne with shame,
She besought him by her spouseless fame,
By the blameless breasts of a maid unmarried,
And locks unmaidenly rent and harried,

And all her flower of body, born
To match the maidenhood of morn,
With the might of the wind's wrath wrenched and
torn.

Vain, all vain as a dead man's vision
Falling by night in his old friends' sight,
To be scattered with slumber and slain ere light;
Such a breath of such a bridegroom in that hour
Of her prayers made mock, of her fears derision,
And a ravage of her youth as of a flower.
With a leap of his limbs as a lion's, a cry from his
lips as of thunder, [Str. 2.
In a storm of amorous godhead filled with fire,

ERECHTHEUS

From the height of the heaven that was rent with
the roar of his coming in sunder,
Sprang the strong God on the spoil of his desire.

And the pines of the hills were as green reeds
shattered,

And their branches as buds of the soft spring
scattered,

And the west wind and east, and the sound of the
south,

Fell dumb at the blast of the north wind's
mouth,

At the cry of his coming out of heaven.

And the wild beasts quailed in the rifts and
hollows

Where hound nor clarion of huntsman follows,

And the depths of the sea were aghast, and
whitened,

And the crowns of their waves were as flame that
lightened,

And the heart of the floods thereof was riven.

But she knew not him coming for terror, she felt not
her wrong that he wrought her, [Ant. 2.

When her locks as leaves were shed before his
breath,

And she heard not for terror his prayer, though the
cry was a God's that besought her,

Blown from lips that strew the world-wide seas
with death.

For the heart was molten within her to hear,

And her knees beneath her were loosened for
fear,

ERECHTHEUS

And her blood fast bound as a frost-bound water,
And the soft new bloom of the green earth's
daughter

Wind-wasted as blossom of a tree;

As the wild God rapt her from earth's breast
lifted,

On the strength of the stream of his dark breath
drifted,

From the bosom of earth as a bride from the mother,
With storm for bridesman and wreck for brother,
As a cloud that he sheds upon the sea.

Of this hoary-headed woe [*Epode.*

Song made memory long ago;

Now a younger grief to mourn

Needs a new song younger born.

Who shall teach our tongues to reach

What strange height of saddest speech,

For the new bride's sake that is given to be

A stay to fetter the foot of the sea,

Lest it quite spurn down and trample the town,

Ere the violets be dead that were plucked for
its crown,

Or its olive-leaf whiten and wither?

Who shall say of the wind's way

That he journeyed yesterday,

Or the track of the storm that shall sound to-
morrow,

If the new be more than the grey-grown sorrow?

For the wind of the green first season was keen,

And the blast shall be sharper than blew between

That the breath of the sea blows hither.

ERECHTHEUS

HERALD OF EUMOLPUS

Old men, grey borderers on the march of death,
Tongue-fighters, tough of talk and sinewy speech,
Else nerveless, from no crew of such faint folk
Whose tongues are stouter than their hands come I
To bid not you to battle; let them strike
Whose swords are sharper than your keen-tongued
wail,

And ye, sit fast and sorrow; but what man
Of all this land-folk and earth-labouring herd
For heart or hand seems foremost, him I call
If heart be his to hearken, him bid forth
To try if one be in the sun's sight born
Of all that grope and grovel on dry ground
That may join hands in battle-grip for death
With them whose seed and strength is of the sea.

CHORUS

Know thou this much for all thy loud blast blown,
We lack not hands to speak with, swords to plead,
For proof of peril, not of boisterous breath,
Sea-wind and storm of barren mouths that foam
And rough rock's edge of menace; and short space
May lesson thy large ignorance and inform
This insolence with knowledge if there live
Men earth-begotten of no tenderer thews
Than knit the great joints of the grim sea's brood
With hasps of steel together; heaven to help,
One man shall break, even on their own flood's
verge,
That iron bulk of battle; but thine eye

ERECHTHEUS

That sees it now swell higher than sand or shore
Haply shall see not when thine host shall shrink.

HERALD OF EUMOLPUS

Not haply, nay, but surely, shall not thine.

CHORUS

That lot shall no God give who fights for thee.

HERALD OF EUMOLPUS

Shall Gods bear bit and bridle, fool, of men?

CHORUS

Nor them forbid we nor shalt thou constrain.

HERALD OF EUMOLPUS

Yet say'st thou none shall make the good lot mine?

CHORUS

Of thy side none, nor moved for fear of thee.

HERALD OF EUMOLPUS

Gods hast thou then to baffle Gods of ours?

CHORUS

Nor thine nor mine, but equal-souled are they.

HERALD OF EUMOLPUS

Toward good and ill, then, equal-eyed of soul?

CHORUS

Nay, but swift-eyed to note where ill thoughts breed.

ERECHTHEUS

HERALD OF EUMOLPUS

Thy shaft word-feathered flies yet far of me.

CHORUS

Pride knows not, wounded, till the heart be cleft.

HERALD OF EUMOLPUS

No shaft wounds deep whose wing is plumed with
words.

CHORUS

Lay that to heart, and bid thy tongue learn grace.

HERALD OF EUMOLPUS

Grace shall thine own crave soon too late of mine.

CHORUS

Boast thou till then, but I wage words no more.

ERECHTHEUS

Man, what shrill wind of speech and wrangling air
Blows in our ears a summons from thy lips
Winged with what message, or what gift or grace
Requiring? none but what his hand may take
Here may the foe think hence to reap, nor this
Except some doom from Godward yield it him.

HERALD OF EUMOLPUS

King of this land-folk, by my mouth to thee
Thus saith the son of him that shakes thine earth,
Eumolpus; now the stakes of war are set,
For land or sea to win by throw and wear;

ERECHTHEUS

Choose therefore or to quit thy side and give
The palm unfought for to his bloodless hand,
Or by that father's sceptre, and the foot
Whose tramp far off makes tremble for pure fear
Thy soul-struck mother, piercing like a sword
The immortal womb that bare thee; by the waves
That no man bridles and that bound thy world,
And by the winds and storms of all the sea,
He swears to raze from eyeshot of the sun
This city named not of his father's name,
And wash to deathward down one flood of doom
This whole fresh brood of earth yeaned naturally,
Green yet and faint in its first blade, unblown
With yellow hope of harvest; so do thou,
Seeing whom thy time is come to meet, for fear
Yield, or gird up thy force to fight and die.

ERECHTHEUS

To fight then be it; for if to die or live,
No man but only a God knows this much yet
Seeing us fare forth, who bear but in our hands
The weapons not the fortunes of our fight;
For these now rest as lots that yet undrawn
Lie in the lap of the unknown hour; but this
I know, not thou, whose hollow mouth of storm
Is but a warlike wind, a sharp salt breath
That bites and wounds not; death nor life of mine
Shall give to death or lordship of strange kings
The soul of this live city, nor their heel
Bruise her dear brow discrowned, nor snaffle or goad
Wound her free mouth or stain her sanguine side
Yet masterless of man; so bid thy lord

ERECHTHEUS

Learn ere he weep to learn it, and too late
Gnash teeth that could not fasten on her flesh,
And foam his life out in dark froth of blood
Vain as a wind's waif of the loud-mouthed sea
Torn from the wave's edge whitening. Tell him
this;

Though thrice his might were mustered for our scathe
And thicker set with fence of thorn-edged spears
Than sands are whirled about the wintering beach
When storms have swoln the rivers, and their blasts
Have breached the broad sea-banks with stress of
sea,

That waves of inland and the main make war
As men that mix and grapple; though his ranks
Were more to number than all wildwood leaves
The wind waves on the hills of all the world,
Yet should the heart not faint, the head not fall,
The breath not fail of Athens. Say, the Gods
From lips that have no more on earth to say
Have told thee this the last good news or ill
That I shall speak in sight of earth and sun
Or he shall hear and see them: for the next
That ear of his from tongue of mine may take
Must be the first word spoken underground
From dead to dead in darkness. Hence; make
haste,

Lest war's fleet foot be swifter than thy tongue
And I that part not to return again
On him that comes not to depart away
Be fallen before thee; for the time is full,
And with such mortal hope as knows not fear
I go this high last way to the end of all.

ERECHTHEUS

CHORUS

Who shall put a bridle in the mourner's lips to
 chasten them, [Str. 1.
Or seal up the fountains of his tears for shame?
Song nor prayer nor prophecy shall slacken tears nor
 hasten them,
Till grief be within him as a burnt-out flame;
 Till the passion be broken in his breast
 And the might thereof molten into rest,
 And the rain of eyes that weep be dry,
 And the breath be stilled of lips that sigh.
Death at last for all men is a harbour; yet they flee
 from it, [Ant. 1.
Set sails to the storm-wind and again to sea;
Yet for all their labour no whit further shall they be
 from it,
Nor longer but wearier shall their life's work be.
 And with anguish of travail until night
 Shall they steer into shipwreck out of sight,
 And with oars that break and shrouds that strain
 Shall they drive whence no ship steers again.
Bitter and strange is the word of the God most
 high, [Str. 2.
 And steep the strait of his way.
Through a pass rock-rimmed and narrow the light
 that gleams
On the faces of men falls faint as the dawn of dreams,
The dayspring of death as a star in an under sky
 Where night is the dead men's day.
As darkness and storm is his will that on earth is
 done, [Ant. 2.

ERECHTHEUS

As a cloud is the face of his strength.
King of kings, holiest of holies, and mightiest of
 might,
Lord of the lords of thine heaven that are humble in
 thy sight,
Hast thou set not an end for the path of the fires of
 the sun,

 To appoint him a rest at length?
Hast thou told not by measure the waves of the
 waste wide sea, [Str. 3.
And the ways of the wind their master and thrall to
 thee?

 Hast thou filled not the furrows with fruit for
 the world's increase?
Has thine ear not heard from of old or thine eye not
 read
The thought and the deed of us living, the doom of
 us dead?

 Hast thou made not war upon earth, and
 again made peace?
Therefore, O father, that seest us whose lives are a
 breath, [Ant. 3.
Take off us thy burden, and give us not wholly to
 death.

 For lovely is life, and the law wherein all
 things live,
And gracious the season of each, and the hour of its
 kind,
And precious the seed of his life in a wise man's
 mind;

 But all save life for his life will a base man
 give.

ERECHTHEUS

But a life that is given for the life of the whole live
land, [Str. 4.]

From a heart unspotted a gift of a spotless hand,
Of pure will perfect and free, for the land's life's sake,
What man shall fear not to put forth his hand and
take?

For the fruit of a sweet life plucked in its pure green
prime [Ant. 4.]

On his hand who plucks is as blood, on his soul as
crime.

With cursing ye buy not blessing, nor peace with
strife,

And the hand is hateful that chaffers with death for
life.

Hast thou heard, O my heart, and endurest
est [Str. 5.]

The word that is said,

What a garland by sentence found surest

Is wrought for what head?

With what blossomless flowerage of sea-foam and
blood-coloured foliage inwound

It shall crown as a heifer's for slaughter the forehead
for marriage uncrowned?

How the veils and the wreaths that should
cover [Ant. 5.]

The brows of the bride

Shall be shed by the breath of what lover

And scattered aside?

With a blast of the mouth of what bridegroom the
crowns shall be cast from her hair,

And her head by what altar made humble be left of
them naked and bare?

ERECHTHEUS

At a shrine unbeloved of a God un beholden a gift
shall be given for the land, [Str. 6.

That its ramparts though shaken with clamour and
horror of manifold waters may stand:

That the crests of its citadels crowned and its turrets
that thrust up their heads to the sun

May behold him unblinded with darkness of waves
overmastering their bulwarks begun.

As a bride shall they bring her, a prey for the bride-
groom, a flower for the couch of her lord; [Ant. 6.

They shall muffle her mouth that she cry not or
curse them, and cover her eyes from the sword.

They shall fasten her lips as with bit and with bridle,
and darken the light of her face,

That the soul of the slayer may not falter, his heart
be not molten, his hand give not grace.

If she weep then, yet may none that hear take
pity; [Str. 7.

If she cry not, none should hearken though she
cried.

Shall a virgin shield thine head for love, O
city,

With a virgin's blood anointed as for pride?

Yet we held thee dear and hallowed of her fa-
vour, [Ant. 7.

Dear of all men held thy people to her heart;
Nought she loves the breath of blood, the sanguine
savour,

Who hath built with us her throne and chosen
her part.

Bloodless are her works, and sweet [Epode.

All the ways that feel her feet;

ERECHTHEUS

From the empire of her eyes
Light takes life and darkness flies;
From the harvest of her hands
Wealth strikes root in prosperous lands;
Wisdom of her word is made;
At her strength is strength afraid;
From the beam of her bright spear
War's fleet foot goes back for fear;
In her shrine she reared the birth
Fire-begotten on live earth;
Glory from her helm was shed
On his olive-shadowed head;
By no hand but his shall she
Scourge the storms back of the sea,
To no fame but his shall give
Grace, being dead, with hers to live,
And in double name divine
Half the godhead of their shrine
But now with what word, with what woe may we
meet
The timeless passage of piteous feet,
Hither that bend to the last way's end
They shall walk upon earth?
What song be rolled for a bride black-stoled
And the mother whose hand of her hand hath
hold?
For anguish of heart is my soul's strength broken
And the tongue sealed fast that would fain have
spoken,
To behold thee, O child of so bitter a birth
That we counted so sweet,
What way thy steps to what bride-feast tend,

ERECHTHEUS

What gift he must give that shall wed thee for token
If the bridegroom be goodly to greet.

CHTHONIA

People, old men of my city, lordly wise and hoar of
head,
I a spouseless bride and crownless but with garlands
of the dead
From the fruitful light turn silent to my dark un-
childbed bed.

CHORUS

Wise of word was he too surely, but with deadlier
wisdom wise,
First who gave thee name from under earth, no
breath from upper skies,
When, foredoomed to this day's darkness, their first
daylight filled thine eyes.

PRAXITHEA

Child, my child that wast and art but death's and
now no more of mine,
Half my heart is cloven with anguish by the sword
made sharp for thine,
Half exalts its wing for triumph, that I bare thee
thus divine.

CHTHONIA

Though for me the sword's edge thirst that sets no
point against thy breast,
Mother, O my mother, where I drank of life and fell
on rest.
Thine, not mine, is all the grief that marks this hour
accurst and blest.

ERECHTHEUS

CHORUS

Sweet thy sleep and sweet the bosom was that gave
thee sleep and birth;
Harder now the breast, and girded with no marriage-
band for girth,
Where thine head shall sleep, the namechild of the
lords of under earth.

PRAXITHEA

Dark the name and dark the gifts they gave thee,
child, in childbirth were,
Sprung from him that rent the womb of earth, a
bitter seed to bear,
Born with groanings of the ground that gave him
way toward heaven's dear air.

CHTHONIA

Day to day makes answer, first to last, and life to
death; but I,
Born for death's sake, die for life's sake, if indeed
this be to die,
This my doom that seals me deathless till the
springs of time run dry.

CHORUS

Children shalt thou bear to memory, that to man
shalt bring forth none;
Yea, the lordliest that lift eyes and hearts and songs
to meet the sun,
Names to fire men's ears like music till the round
world's race be run.

ERECHTHEUS

PRAXITHEA

I thy mother, named of Gods that wreak revenge and
brand with blame,
Now for thy love shall be loved as thou, and famous
with thy fame,
While this city's name on earth shall be for earth her
mightiest name.

CHTHONIA

That I may give this poor girl's blood of mine
Scarce yet sun-warmed with summer, this thin life
Still green with flowerless growth of seedling days,
To build again my city; that no drop
Fallen of these innocent veins on the cold ground
But shall help knit the joints of her firm walls
To knead the stones together, and make sure
The band about her maiden girdlestead
Once fastened, and of all men's violent hands
Inviolable for ever; these to me
Were no such gifts as crave no thanksgiving,
If with one blow dividing the sheer life
I might make end, and one pang wind up all
And seal mine eyes from sorrow; for such end
The Gods give none they love not; but my heart,
That leaps up lightened of all sloth or fear
To take the sword's point, yet with one thought's
load
Flags, and falls back, broken of wing, that halts
Maimed in mid flight for thy sake and borne down,
Mother, that in the places where I played
An arm's length from thy bosom and no more

ERECHTHEUS

Shalt find me never, nor thine eye wax glad
To mix with mine its eyesight and for love
Laugh without word, filled with sweet light, and
speak

Divine dumb things of the inward spirit and heart,
Moved silently; nor hand or lip again
Touch hand or lip of either, but for mine
Shall thine meet only shadows of swift night,
Dreams and dead thoughts of dead things; and the
bed

Thou strewedst, a sterile place for all time, strewn
For my sleep only, with its void sad sheets
Shall vex thee, and the unfruitful coverlid
For empty days reproach me dead, that leave
No profit of my body, but am gone
As one not worth being born to bear no seed,
A sapless stock and branchless; yet thy womb
Shall want not honour of me, that brought forth
For all this people freedom, and for earth
From the unborn city born out of my blood
To light the face of all men evermore
Glory; but lay thou this to thy great heart
Whereunder in the dark of birth conceived
Mine unlit life lay girdled with the zone
That bound thy bridal bosom; set this thought
Against all edge of evil as a sword
To beat back sorrow, that for all the world
Thou brought'st me forth a saviour, who shall save
Athens; for none but I from none but thee
Shall take this death for garland; and the men
Mine unknown children of unsounded years,
My sons unrisen shall rise up at thine hand,

ERECHTHEUS

Sown of thy seed to bring forth seed to thee,
And call thee most of all most fruitful found
Blessed; but me too for my barren womb
More than my sisters for their children born
Shall these give honour, yea in scorn's own place
Shall men set love and bring for mockery praise
And thanks for curses; for the dry wild vine
Scoffed at and cursed of all men that was I
Shall shed them wine to make the world's heart
warm,

That all eyes seeing may lighten, and all ears
Hear and be kindled; such a draught to drink
Shall be the blood that bids this dust bring forth,
The chaliced life here split on this mine earth,
Mine, my great father's mother; whom I pray
Take me now gently, tenderly take home,
And softly lay in his my cold chaste hand
Who is called of men by my name, being of Gods
Charged only and chosen to bring men under earth,
And now must lead and stay me with his staff
A silent soul led of a silent God,
Toward sightless things led sightless; and on earth
I see now but the shadow of mine end,
And this last light of all for me in heaven.

PRAXITHEA

Farewell I bid thee; so bid thou not me,
Lest the Gods hear and mock us; yet on these
I lay the weight not of this grief, nor cast
Ill words for ill deeds back; for if one say
They have done men wrong, what hurt have they to
hear,

ERECHTHEUS

Or he what help to have said it? surely, child,
If one among men born might say it and live
Blameless, none more than I may, who being vexed
Hold yet my peace; for now through tears enough
Mine eyes have seen the sun that from this day
Thine shall see never more; and in the night
Enough has blown of evil, and mine ears
With wail enough the winds have filled, and brought
Too much of cloud from over the sharp sea
To mar for me the morning; such a blast
Rent from these wide void arms and helpless breast
Long since one graft of me disbranched, and bore
Beyond the wild ways of the unwandered world
And loud wastes of the thunder-throated sea,
Springs of the night and openings of the heaven,
The old garden of the Sun; whence never more
From west or east shall winds bring back that blow
From folds of opening heaven or founts of night
The flower of mine once ravished, born my child
To bear strange children; nor on wings of theirs
Shall comfort come back to me, nor their sire
Breathe help upon my peril, nor his strength
Raise up my weakness; but of Gods and men
I drift unsteered on ruin, and the wave
Darkens my head with imminent height, and hangs
Dumb, filled too full with thunder that shall leave
These ears death-deafened when the tide finds tongue
And all its wrath bears on them; thee, O child,
I help not, nor am holpen; fain, ah fain,
More than was ever mother born of man,
Were I to help thee; fain beyond all prayer,
Beyond all thought fain to redeem thee, torn

ERECHTHEUS

More timeless from me sorrowing than the dream
That was thy sister; so shalt thou be too,
Thou but a vision, shadow-shaped of sleep,
By grief made out of nothing; now but once
I touch, but once more hold thee, one more kiss
This last time and none other ever more
Leave on thy lips and leave them. Go; thou wast
My heart, my heart's blood, life-blood of my life,
My child, my nursling: now this breast once thine
Shall rear again no children; never now
Shall any mortal blossom born like thee
Lie there, nor ever with small silent mouth
Draw the sweet springs dry for an hour that feed
The blind blithe life that knows not; never head
Rest here to make these cold veins warm, nor eye
Laugh itself open with the lips that reach
Lovingly toward a fount more loving; these
Death makes as all good lesser things now dead,
And all the latter hopes that flowered from these
And fall as these fell fruitless; no joy more
Shall man take of thy maidenhood, no tongue
Praise it; no good shall eyes get more of thee
That lightened for thy love's sake. Now, take note,
Give ear, O all ye people, that my word
May pierce your hearts through, and the stroke that
cleaves
Be fruitful to them; so shall all that hear
Grow great at heart with child of thought most high
And bring forth seed in season; this my child,
This flower of this my body, this sweet life,
This fair live youth I give you, to be slain,
Spent, shed, poured out, and perish; take my gift

ERECHTHEUS

And give it death and the under Gods who crave
So much for that they give; for this is more,
Much more is this than all we; for they give
Freedom, and for a blast, an air of breath,
A little soul that is not, they give back
Light for all eyes, cheer for all hearts, and life
That fills the world's width full of fame and praise
And mightier love than children's. This they give,
The grace to make thy country great, and wrest
From time and death power to take hold on her
And strength to scathe for ever; and this gift,
Is this no more than man's love is or mine,
Mine and all mothers' ? nay, where that seems more,
Where one loves life of child, wife, father, friend,
Son, husband, mother, more than this, even there
Are all these lives worth nothing, all loves else
With this love slain and buried, and their tomb
A thing for shame to spit on; for what love
Hath a slave left to love with ? or the heart
Base-born and bound in bondage fast to fear,
What should it do to love thee ? what hath he,
The man that hath no country ? Gods nor men
Have such to friend, yoked beast-like to base life,
Vile, fruitless, grovelling at the foot of death,
Landless and kinless thralls of no man's blood,
Unchilded and unmothered, abject limbs
That breed things abject; but who loves on earth
Not friend, wife, husband, father, mother, child,
Nor loves his own life for his own land's sake,
But only this thing most, more this than all,
He loves all well and well of all is loved,
And this love lives for ever. See now, friends,

ERECHTHEUS

My countrymen, my brothers, with what heart
I give you this that of your hands again
The Gods require for Athens; as I give
So give ye to them what their hearts would have
Who shall give back things better; yea, and these
I take for me to witness, all these Gods,
Were their great will more grievous than it is,
Not one but three, for this one thin-spun thread
A threefold band of children would I give
For this land's love's sake; for whose love to-day
I bid thee, child, fare deathward and farewell.

CHORUS

O wofullest of women, yet of all
Happiest, thy word be hallowed; in all time
Thy name shall blossom, and from strange new
tongues
High things be spoken of thee; for such grace
The Gods have dealt to no man, that on none
Have laid so heavy sorrow. From this day
Live thou assured of godhead in thy blood,
And in thy fate no lowlier than a God
In all good things and evil; such a name
Shall be thy child this city's, and thine own
Next hers that called it Athens. Go now forth
Blest, and grace with thee to the doors of death.

I

CHTHONIA

O city, O glory of Athens, O crown of my father's
land, farewell.

CHORUS

For welfare is given her of thee.

ERECHTHEUS

CHTHONIA

O Goddess, be good to thy people, that in them
dominion and freedom may dwell.

CHORUS

Turn from us the strengths of the sea.

CHTHONIA

Let glory's and theirs be one name in the mouths of
all nations made glad with the sun.

CHORUS

For the cloud is blown back with thy breath.

CHTHONIA

With the long last love of mine eyes I salute thee,
O land where my days now are done.

CHORUS

But her life shall be born of thy death.

CHTHONIA

I put on me the darkness thy shadow, my mother,
and symbol, O Earth, of my name.

CHORUS

For thine was her witness from birth.

CHTHONIA

In thy likeness I come to thee darkling, a daughter
whose dawn and her even are the same.

ERECHTHEUS

CHORUS

Be thine heart to her gracious, O Earth.

CHTHONIA

To thine own kind be kindly, for thy son's name's
sake.

CHORUS

That sons unborn may praise thee and thy first-
born son.

CHTHONIA

Give me thy sleep, who give thee all my life awake.

CHORUS

Too swift a sleep, ere half the web of day be spun.

CHTHONIA

Death brings the shears or ever life wind up the weft.

CHORUS

Their edge is ground and sharpened; who shall
stay his hand?

CHTHONIA

The woof is thin, a small short life, with no thread
left.

CHORUS

Yet hath it strength, stretched out, to shelter all
the land.

CHTHONIA

Too frail a tent for covering, and a screen too strait.

ERECHTHEUS

CHORUS

Yet broad enough for buckler shall thy sweet
life be.

CHTHONIA

A little bolt to bar off battle from the gate.

CHORUS

A wide sea-wall, that shatters the besieging sea.

CHTHONIA

I lift up mine eyes from the skirts of the shadow,
[*Str.*

From the border of death to the limits of light;
O streams and rivers of mountain and meadow
That hallow the last of my sight,
O father that wast of my mother
Cephisus, O thou too his brother
From the bloom of whose banks as a prey
Winds harried my sister away,
O crown on the world's head lying
Too high for its waters to drown,
Take yet this one word of me dying,
O city, O crown.

Though land-wind and sea-wind with mouths that
blow slaughter [Ani.

Should gird them to battle against thee again,
New-born of the blood of a maiden thy daughter,
The rage of their breath shall be vain.
For their strength shall be quenched and made
idle,
And the foam of their mouths find a bridle,

ERECHTHEUS

And the height of their heads bow down
At the foot of the towers of the town.
Be blest and beloved as I love thee
Of all that shall draw from thee breath;
Be thy life as the sun's is above thee;
I go to my death.

CHORUS

Many loves of many a mood and many a kind
[*Str. 1.*
Fill the life of man, and mould the secret mind;
Many days bring many dooms, to loose and bind;
Sweet is each in season, good the gift it brings,
Sweet as change of night and day with altering
wings,
Night that lulls world-weary day, day that comforts
night,
Night that fills our eyes with sleep, day that fills with
light.
None of all is lovelier, loftier love is none, [*Ant. 1.*
Less is bride's for bridegroom, mother's less for
son,
Child, than this that crowns and binds up all in
one;
Love of thy sweet light, thy fostering breast and
hand,
Mother¹Earth, and city chosen, and natural land;
Hills that bring the strong streams forth, heights of
heavenlier air,
Fields aflower with winds and suns, woods with
shadowing hair.

ERECHTHEUS

But none of the nations of men shall they liken to
thee, [Str. 2.
Whose children true-born and the fruit of thy body
are we.
The rest are thy sons but in figure, in word are thy
seed;
We only the flower of thy travail, thy children in-
deed.
Of thy soil hast thou fashioned our limbs, of thy
waters their blood,
And the life of thy springs everlasting is fount of our
flood.
No wind oversea blew us hither adrift on thy
shore,
None sowed us by land in thy womb that conceived
us and bore.
But the stroke of the shaft of the sunlight that
brought us to birth
Pierced only and quickened thy furrows to bear us,
O Earth.
With the beams of his love wast thou cloven as with
iron or fire,
And the life in thee yearned for his life, and grew
great with desire.
And the hunger and thirst to be wounded and healed
with his dart
Made fruitful the love in thy veins and the depth of
thine heart.
And the showers out of heaven overflowing and
liquid with love
Fulfilled thee with child of his godhead as rain from
above.

ERECHTHEUS

Such desire had yet wain of each other, till molten
in one [Ant. 2.

Ye might bear and beget of your bodies the fruits of
the sun.

And the trees in their season brought forth and were
kindled anew

By the warmth of the moisture of marriage, the child-
bearing dew.

And the firstlings were fair of the wedlock of heaven
and of earth;

All countries were bounteous with blossom and
burgeon of birth.

Green pastures of grass for all cattle, and life-giving
corn;

But here of thy bosom, here only, the man-child was
born.

All races but one are as aliens engrafted or
sown,

Strange children and changelings; but we, O our
mother, thine own.

Thy nurslings are others, and seedlings they know
not of whom;

For these hast thou fostered, but us thou hast borne
in thy womb.

Who is he of us all, O beloved, that owe thee for
birth,

Who would give not his blood for his birth's sake,
O mother, O Earth?

What landsman is he that was fostered and reared of
thine hand

Who may vaunt him as we may in death though he
died for the land?

ERECHTHEUS

Well doth she therefore who gives thee in guerdon
The bloom of the life of thy giving; [Epode.
And thy body was bowed by no fruitless burden,
That bore such fruit of thee living.
For her face was not darkened for fear,
For her eyelids conceived not a tear,
Nor a cry from her lips craved pity;
But her mouth was a fountain of song,
And her heart as a citadel strong
That guards the heart of the city.

MESSENGER

High things of strong-souled men that loved their
land
On brass and stone are written, and their deeds
On high days chanted; but none graven or sung
That ever set men's eyes or spirits on fire,
Athenians, has the sun's height seen, or earth
Heard in her depth reverberate as from heaven,
More worth men's praise and good report of Gods
Than here I bring for record in your ears.
For now being come to the altar, where as priest
Death ministering should meet her, and his hand
Seal her sweet eyes asleep, the maiden stood,
With light in all her face as of a bride
Smiling, or shine of festal flame by night
Far flung from towers of triumph; and her lips
Trembled with pride in pleasure, that no fear
Blanched them nor death before his time drank dry
The blood whose bloom fulfilled them; for her cheeks
Lightened, and brighter than a bridal veil

ERECHTHEUS

Her hair enrobed her bosom and enrolled
From face to feet the body's whole soft length
As with a cloud sun-saturate; then she spake
With maiden tongue words manlike, but her eyes
Lit mildly like a maiden's: *Countrymen,*
With more goodwill and height of happier heart
I give me to you than my mother bare,
And go more gladly this great way to death
Than young men bound to battle. Then with face
Turned to the shadowiest part of all the shrine
And eyes fast set upon the further shade,
Take me, dear Gods; and as some form had shone
From the deep hollow shadow, some God's tongue
Answered, *I bless you that your guardian grace*
Gives me to guard this country, takes my blood,
Your child's by name, to heal it. Then the priest
Set to the flower sweet snow of her soft throat
The sheer knife's edge that severed it, and loosed
From the fair bondage of so spotless flesh
So strong a spirit; and all that girt them round
Gazing, with souls that hung on that sad stroke,
Groaned, and kept silence after while a man
Might count how far the fresh blood crept, and bathed
How deep the dark robe and the bright shrine's base
Red-rounded with a running ring that grew
More large and duskier as the wells that fed
Were drained of that pure effluence: but the queen
Groaned not nor spake nor wept, but as a dream
Floats out of eyes awakening so past forth
Ghost-like, a shadow of sorrow, from all sight
To the inner court and chamber where she sits
Dumb, till word reach her of this whole day's end.

ERECHTHEUS

CHORUS

More hapless born by far [Str.
Beneath some wintrier star,
One sits in stone among high Lydian snows,
The tomb of her own woes:
Yet happiest was once of the daughters of Gods, and
divine by her sire and her lord,
Ere her tongue was a shaft for the hearts of her sons,
for the heart of her husband a sword.
For she, too great of mind, [Ant.
Grown through her good things blind,
With godless lips and fire of her own breath
Spake all her house to death;
But thou, no mother unmothered, nor kindled in
spirit with pride of thy seed,
Thou hast hallowed thy child for a blameless blood-
offering, and ransomed thy race by thy deed.

MESSENGER

As flower is grafted on flower, so grief on grief
Engrafted brings forth new blossoms of strange tears,
Fresh buds and green fruits of an alien pain;
For now flies rumour on a dark wide wing,
Murmuring of woes more than ye knew, most like
Hers whom ye hailed most wretched; for the twain
Last left of all this house that wore last night
A threefold crown of maidens, and to-day
Should let but one fall dead out of the wreath,
If mad with grief we know not and sore love
For this their sister, or with shame soul-stung
To outlive her dead or doubt lest their lives too

ERECHTHEUS

The Gods require to seal their country safe
And bring the oracular doom to perfect end,
Have slain themselves, and fallen at the altar-foot
Lie by their own hands done to death; and fear
Shakes all the city as winds a wintering tree,
And as dead leaves are men's hearts blown about
And shrunken with ill thoughts, and flowerless
hopes

Parched up with presage, lest the piteous blood
Shed of these maidens guiltless fall and fix
On this land's forehead like a curse that cleaves
To the unclean soul's inexpiate hunted head
Whom his own crime tracks hotlier than a hound
To life's veiled end unsleeping; and this hour
Now blackens toward the battle that must close
All gates of hope and fear on all their hearts
Who tremble toward its issue, knowing not yet
If blood may buy them surety, cleanse or soil
The helpless hands men raise and reach no stay.

CHORUS

Ill thoughts breed fear, and fear ill words; but these
The Gods turn from us that have kept their law.

Let us lift up the strength of our hearts in song,
[Str. 1.

And our souls to the height of the darkling day.

If the wind in our eyes blow blood for spray,
Be the spirit that breathes in us life more strong,
Though the prow reel round and the helm point
wrong,

And sharp reefs whiten the shoreward way.

ERECHTHEUS

For the steersman time sits hidden astern, [*Ant.* 1.
With dark hand plying the rudder of doom,
And the surf-smoke under it flies like fume
As the blast shears off and the oar-blades churn
The foam of our lives that to death return,
Blown back as they break to the gulping
gloom.

What cloud upon heaven is arisen, what shadow,
what sound, [*Str.* 2.
From the world beyond earth, from the night
underground,

That scatters from wings un beholden the weight of
its darkness around?

For the sense of my spirit is broken, and blinded
its eye, [*Ant.* 2.

As the soul of a sick man ready to die,
With fear of the hour that is on me, with dread if an
end be not nigh.

O Earth, O Gods of the land, have ye heart now
to see and to hear [*Str.* 3.

What slays with terror mine eyesight and seals
mine ear?

O fountains of streams everlasting, are all ye not
shrunk up and withered for fear?

Lo, night is arisen on the noon, and her hounds
are in quest by day, [*Ant.* 3.

And the world is fulfilled of the noise of them
crying for their prey,

And the sun's self stricken in heaven, and cast out of
his course as a blind man astray.

From east to west of the south sea-line [*Str.* 4.
Glitters the lightning of spears that shine;

ERECHTHEUS

As a storm-cloud swoln that comes up from the
skirts of the sea

By the wind for helmsman to shoreward fer-
ried,

So black behind them the live storm serried
Shakes earth with the tramp of its foot, and the
terror to be.

Shall the sea give death whom the land gave
birth? [Ant. 4.

O Earth, fair mother, O sweet live Earth,
Hide us again in thy womb from the waves of it,
help us or hide.

As a sword is the heart of the God thy brother,
But thine as the heart of a new-made mother,
To deliver thy sons from his ravin, and rage of his
tide.

O strong north wind, the pilot of cloud and
rain, [Str. 5.

For the gift we gave thee what gift hast thou given
us again?

O God dark-winged, deep-throated, a terror to forth-
faring ships by night,

What bride-song is this that is blown on the blast
of thy breath?

A gift but of grief to thy kinsmen, a song but of
death,

For the bride's folk weeping, and woe for her
father, who finds thee against him in fight.

Turn back from us, turn thy battle, take heed of
our cry; [Ant. 5.

Let thy dread breath sound, and the waters of war
be dry;

ERECHTHEUS

Let thy strong wrath shatter the strength of our foe-
men, the sword of their strength and the shield;
As vapours in heaven, or as waves or the wrecks
of ships,
So break thou the ranks of their spears with the
breath of thy lips,
Till their corpses have covered and clothed as with
raiment the face of the sword-ploughed field.
O son of the rose-red morning, O God twin-born
with the day, [Str. 6.
O wind with the young sun waking, and winged
for the same wide way,
Give up not the house of thy kin to the host thou
hast marshalled from northward for prey.
From the cold of thy cradle in Thrace, from the
mists of the fountains of night, [Ant. 6.
From the bride-bed of dawn whence day leaps
laughing, on fire for his flight,
Come down with their doom in thine hand on the
ships thou hast brought up against us to fight.
For now not in word but in deed is the harvest of
spears begun, [Str. 7.
And its clamour outbellows the thunder, its lightning
outlightens the sun.
From the springs of the morning it thunders and
lightens across and afar
To the wave where the moonset ends and the fall of
the last low star.
With a trampling of drenched red hoofs and an earth-
quake of men that meet,
Strong war sets hand to the scythe, and the furrows
take fire from his feet.

ERECHTHEUS

Earth groans from her great rent heart, and the
hollows of rocks are afraid,
And the mountains are moved, and the valleys as
waves in a storm-wind swayed.
From the roots of the hills to the plain's dim verge
and the dark loud shore,
Air shudders with shrill spears crossing, and hurtling
of wheels that roar.
As the grinding of teeth in the jaws of a lion that
foam as they gnash
Is the shriek of the axles that loosen, the shock of the
poles that crash.
The dense manes darken and glitter, the mouths of
the mad steeds champ,
Their heads flash blind through the battle, and
death's foot rings in their tramp.
For a fourfold host upon earth and in heaven is
arrayed for the fight,
Clouds ruining in thunder and armies encountering
as clouds in the night.
Mine ears are amazed with the terror of trumpets,
with darkness mine eyes,
At the sound of the sea's host charging that deafens
the roar of the sky's.
White frontlet is dashed upon frontlet, and horse
against horse reels hurled,
And the gorge of the gulfs of the battle is wide for
the spoil of the world.
And the meadows are cumbered with shipwreck of
chariots that founder on land, [Ant. 7.
And the horsemen are broken with breach as of
breakers, and scattered as sand.

ERECHTHEUS

Through the roar and recoil of the charges that
 mingle their cries and confound,
Like fire are the notes of the trumpets that flash
 through the darkness of sound.
As the swing of the sea churned yellow that sways
 with the wind as it swells
Is the lift and relapse of the wave of the chargers
 that clash with their bells;
And the clang of the sharp shrill brass through the
 burst of the wave as it shocks
Rings clean as the clear wind's cry through the roar
 of the surge on the rocks:
And the heads of the steeds in their headgear of war,
 and their corseleted breasts,
Gleam broad as the brows of the billows that
 brighten the storm with their crests,
Gleam dread as their bosoms that heave to the ship-
 wrecking wind as they rise,
Filled full of the terror and thunder of water, that
 slays as it dies.
So dire is the glare of their foreheads, so fearful the
 fire of their breath,
And the light of their eyeballs enkindled so bright
 with the lightnings of death;
And the foam of their mouths as the sea's when the
 jaws of its gulf are as graves,
And the ridge of their necks as the wind-shaken
 mane on the ridges of waves:
And their fetlocks afire as they rear drip thick with
 a dewfall of blood
As the lips of the rearing breaker with froth of the
 manslaying flood.

ERECHTHEUS

And the whole plain reels and resounds as the fields
of the sea by night

When the stroke of the wind falls darkling, and
death is the seafarer's light.

But thou, fair beauty of heaven, dear face of the
day nigh dead, [*Epode.*

What horror hath hidden thy glory, what hand hath
muffled thine head?

O sun, with what song shall we call thee, or ward
off thy wrath by what name,

With what prayer shall we seek to thee, soothe with
what incense, assuage with what gift,

If thy light be such only as lighens to deathward
the seaman adrift

With the fire of his house for a beacon, that foe-
men have wasted with flame?

Arise now, lift up thy light; give ear to us, put forth
thine hand,

Reach toward us thy torch of deliverance, a lamp for
the night of the land.

Thine eye is the light of the living, no lamp for the
dead;

O, lift up the light of thine eye on the dark of our
dread.

Who hath blinded thee? who hath prevailed on
thee? who hath ensnared?

Who hath broken thy bow, and the shafts for
thy battle prepared?

Have they found out a fether to bind thee, a chain
for thine arm that was bared?

Be the name of thy conqueror set forth, and the
might of thy master declared.

ERECHTHEUS

O God, fair God of the morning, O glory of
day,
What ails thee to cast from thy forehead its gar-
land away?
To pluck from thy temples their chaplet en-
wreathed of the light,
And bind on the brows of thy godhead a frontlet
of night?
Thou hast loosened the necks of thine horses, and
goaded their flanks with affright,
To the race of a course that we know not on ways
that are hid from our sight.
As a wind through the darkness the wheels of
their chariot are whirled,
And the light of its passage is night on the face of
the world.
And there falls from the wings of thy glory no help
from on high,
But a shadow that smites us with fear and desire
of thine eye.
For our hearts are as reeds that a wind on the water
bows down and goes by,
To behold not thy comfort in heaven that hath left
us untimely to die.
But what light is it now leaps forth on the land
Enkindling the waters and ways of the air
From thy forehead made bare,
From the gleam of thy bow-bearing hand?
Hast thou set not thy right hand again to the
string,
With the back-bowed horns bent sharp for a spring
And the barbed shaft drawn,

ERECHTHEUS

Till the shrill steel sing and the tense nerve ring
That pierces the heart of the dark with dawn,

O huntsman, O king,

When the flame of thy face hath twilight in chase

As a hound hath a blood-mottled fawn?

He has glanced into golden the grey sea-strands,

And the clouds are shot through with the fires of

his hands,

And the height of the hollow of heaven that he

fills

As the heart of a strong man is quickened and

thrills;

High over the folds of the low-lying lands,

On the shadowless hills

As a guard on his watchtower he stands.

All earth and all ocean, all depth and all height,

At the flash of an eyebeam are filled with his

might:

The sea roars backward, the storm drops dumb,

And silence as dew on the fire of the fight

Falls kind in our ears as his face in our sight

With presage of peace to come.

Fresh hope in my heart from the ashes of dread

Leaps clear as a flame from the pyres of the dead,

That joy out of woe

May arise as the spring out of tempest and snow,

With the flower-feasted month in her hands rose-

red

Borne soft as a babe from the bearing-bed.

Yet it knows not indeed if a God be friend,

If rescue may be from the rage of the sea,

Or the wrath of its lord have end.

ERECHTHEUS

For the season is full now of death or of birth,
To bring forth life, or an end of all;
And we know not if anything stand or fall
That is girdled about with the round sea's girth
 As a town with its wall;
But thou that art highest of the Gods most high,
That art lord if we live, that art lord though we
 die,
Have heed of the tongues of our terror that cry
 For a grace to the children of Earth.

ATHENIAN HERALD

Sons of Athens, heavy-laden with the holy weight of
 years,
Be your hearts as young men's lightened of their
 loathlier load of fears;
For the wave is sunk whose thunder shoreward
 shook the shuddering lands,
And unbreached of warring waters Athens like a sea-
 rock stands.

CHORUS

Well thy word has cheered us, well thy face and
 glittering eyes, that spake
Ere thy tongue spake words of comfort: yet no
 pause behoves it make
Till the whole good hap find utterance that the
 Gods have given at length.

ATHENIAN HERALD

All is this, that yet the city stands unforced by
 stranger strength.

ERECHTHEUS

CHORUS

Sweeter sound might no mouth utter in man's ear
than this thy word.

ATHENIAN HERALD

Feed thy soul then full of sweetness till some bitterer
note be heard.

CHORUS

None, if this ring sure, can mar the music fallen from
heaven as rain.

ATHENIAN HERALD

If no fire of sun or star untimely sear the tender
grain.

CHORUS

Fresh the dewfall of thy tidings on our hopes re-
flowering lies.

ATHENIAN HERALD

Till a joyless shower and fruitless blight them, rain-
ing from thine eyes.

CHORUS

Bitter springs have barren issues; these bedew grief's
arid sands.

ATHENIAN HERALD

Such thank-offerings ask such altars as expect thy
suppliant hands.

ERECHTHEUS

CHORUS

Tears for triumph, wail for welfare, what strange
godhead's shrine requires?

ATHENIAN HERALD

Death's or victory's be it, a funeral torch feeds all
its festal fires.

CHORUS

Like a star should burn the beacon flaming from our
city's head.

ATHENIAN HERALD

Like a balefire should the flame go up that says the
king is dead.

CHORUS

Out of heaven, a wild-haired meteor, shoots this new
sign, scattering fear.

ATHENIAN HERALD

Yea, the word has wings of fire that hovered, loth to
burn thine ear.

CHORUS

From thy lips it leapt forth loosened on a shrill and
shadowy wing.

ATHENIAN HERALD

Long they faltered, fain to hide it deep as death that
hides the king.

ERECHTHEUS

CHORUS

Dead with him blind hope lies blasted by the lightning of one sword.

ATHENIAN HERALD

On thy tongue truth wars with error; no man's edge hath touched thy lord.

CHORUS

False was thine then, jangling menace like a war-steed's brow-bound bell?

ATHENIAN HERALD

False it rang not joy nor sorrow; but by no man's hand he fell.

CHORUS

Vainly then good news and evil through so faint a trumpet spake.

ATHENIAN HERALD

All too long thy soul yet labours, as who sleeping fain would wake,
Waking, fain would fall on sleep again; the woe thou knowest not yet,
When thou knowest, shall make thy memory thirst and hunger to forget.

CHORUS

Long my heart has hearkened, hanging on thy clamorous ominous cry,
Fain yet fearful of the knowledge whence it looks to live or die;

ERECHTHEUS

Now to take the perfect presage of thy dark and
sidelong flight
Comes a surer soothsayer sorrowing, sable-stoled as
birds of night.

PRAXITHEA

Man, what thy mother bare thee born to say
Speak; for no word yet wavering on thy lip
Can wound me worse than thought forestalls or fear.

ATHENIAN HERALD

I have no will to weave too fine or far,
O queen, the weft of sweet with bitter speech,
Bright words with darkling; but the brief truth
shown

Shall plead my pardon for a lingering tongue,
Loth yet to strike hope through the heart and slay.
The sun's light still was lordly housed in heaven
When the twain fronts of war encountering smote
First fire out of the battle; but not long
Had the fresh wave of windy fight begun
Heaving, and all the surge of swords to sway,
When timeless night laid hold of heaven, and took
With its great gorge the noon as in a gulf,
Strangled; and thicker than the shrill-winged shafts
Flew the fleet lightnings, held in chase through
heaven

By headlong heat of thunders on their trail
Loosed as on quest of quarry; that our host
Smit with sick presage of some wrathful God
Quailed, but the foe as from one iron throat
With one great sheer sole thousand-throated cry

ERECHTHEUS

Shook earth, heart-staggered from their shout, and
 clove

The eyeless hollow of heaven; and breached there-
 with

As with an onset of strength-shattering sound

The rent vault of the roaring noon of night

From her throned seat of usurpation rang

Reverberate answer; such response there pealed

As though the tide's charge of a storming sea

Had burst the sky's wall, and made broad a breach

In the ambient girth and bastion flanked with stars

Guarding the fortress of the Gods, and all

Crashed now together on ruin; and through that cry

And higher above it ceasing one man's note

Tore its way like a trumpet: *Charge, make end,*

*Charge, halt not, strike, rend up their strength by the
 roots,*

*Strike, break them, make your birthright's promise
 sure,*

Show your hearts hardier than the fenced land breeds

And souls breathed in you from no spirit of earth,

Sons of the sea's waves; and all ears that heard

Rang with that fiery cry, that the fine air

Thereat was fired, and kindling filled the plain

Full of that fierce and trumpet-quenching breath

That spake the clarions silent; no glad song

For folk to hear that wist how dire a God

Begat this peril to them, what strong race

Fathered the sea-born tongue that sang them death,

Threatening; so raged through the red foam of
 fight

Poseidon's son Eumolpus; and the war

ERECHTHEUS

Quailed round him coming, and our side bore back,
As a stream thwarted by the wind and sea
That meet it midway mouth to mouth, and beat
The flood back of its issue; but the king
Shouted against them, crying, *O Father-God,
Source of the God my father, from thine hand
Send me what end seems good now in thy sight,
But death from mine to this man;* and the word
Quick on his lips yet like a blast of fire
Blew them together; and round its lords that met
Paused all the reeling battle; two main waves
Meeting, one hurled sheer from the sea-wall back
That shocks it sideways, one right in from sea
Charging, that full in face takes at one blow
That whole recoil and ruin, with less fear
Startle men's eyes late shipwrecked; for a breath,
Crest fronting crest hung, wave to wave rose poised,
Then clashed, breaker to breaker; cloud with cloud
In heaven, chariot with chariot closed on earth,
One fourfold flash and thunder; yet a breath,
And with the king's spear through his red heart's
root

Driven, like a rock split from its hill-side, fell
Hurled under his own horsehoofs dead on earth
The sea-beast that made war on earth from sea,
Dumb, with no shrill note left of storming song,
Eumolpus; and his whole host with one stroke
Spear-stricken through its dense deep iron heart
Fell hurtling from us, and in fierce recoil
Drew seaward as with one wide wail of waves,
Resorbed with reluctance; such a groan
Rose from the fluctuant reflue of its ranks,

ERECHTHEUS

Sucked sullen back and strengthless; but scarce yet
The steeds had sprung and wheels had bruised their
lord

Fallen, when from highest height of the Sundering
heaven

The Father for his brother's son's sake slain
Sent a sheer shaft of lightning writhen and smote
Right on his son's son's forehead, that unhelmed
Shone like the star that shines down storm, and gave
Light to men's eyes that saw thy lord their king
Stand and take breath from battle; then too soon
Saw sink down as a sunset in sea-mist

The high bright head that here in van of the earth
Rose like a headland, and through storm and night
Took all the sea's wrath on it; and now dead
They bring thee back by war-forsaken ways
The strength called once thy husband, the great
guard

That was of all men, stay of all men's lives,
They bear him slain of no man but a God,
Godlike; and toward him dead the city's gates
Fling their arms open mother-like, through him
Saved; and the whole clear land is purged of war
What wilt thou say now of this weal and woe?

PRAXITHEA

I praise the Gods for Athens. O sweet Earth,
Mother, what joy thy soul has of thy son,
Thy life of my dead lord, mine own soul knows
That knows thee godlike; and what grief should
mine,

What sorrow should my heart have, who behold

ERECHTHEUS

Thee made so heavenlike happy? This alone
I only of all these blessed, all thy kind,
Crave this for blessing to me, that in theirs
Have but a part thus bitter; give me too
Death, and the sight of eyes that meet not mine.
And thee too from no godless heart or tongue
Reproachful, thee too by thy living name,
Father divine, merciful God, I call,
Spring of my life-springs, fountain of my stream,
Pure and poured forth to one great end with thine,
Sweet head sublime of triumph and these tears,
Cephisus, if thou seest as gladly shed
Thy blood in mine as thine own waves are given
To do this great land good, to give for love
The same lips drink and comfort the same hearts,
Do thou then, O my father, white-souled God,
To thy most pure earth-hallowing heart eterne
Take what thou gavest to be given for these,
Take thy child to thee; for her time is full,
For all she hath borne she hath given, seen all she
had

Flow from her, from her eyes and breasts and hands
Flow forth to feed this people; but be thou,
Dear God and gracious to all souls alive,
Good to thine own seed also; let me sleep,
Father; my sleepless darkling day is done,
My day of life like night, but slumberless:
For all my fresh fair springs, and his that ran
In one stream's bed with mine, are all run out
Into the deep of death. The Gods have saved
Athens; my blood has bought her at their hand,
And ye sit safe; be glorious and be glad

ERECHTHEUS

As now for all time always, countrymen,
And love my dead for ever; but me, me,
What shall man give for these so good as death?

CHORUS

From the cup of my heart I pour through my lips
along [Str. 1.
The mingled wine of a joyful and sorrowful song;
Wine sweeter than honey and bitterer than blood
that is poured
From the chalice of gold, from the point of the two-
edged sword.
For the city redeemed should joy flow forth as a
flood,
And a dirge make moan for the city polluted with
blood.
Great praise should the Gods have surely, my
country, of thee, [Ant. 1.
Were thy brow but as white as of old for thy sons to
see,
Were thy hands as bloodless, as blameless thy cheek
divine;
But a stain on it stands of the life-blood offered for
thine.
What thanks shall we give that are mixed not and
marred with dread
For the price that has ransomed thine own with
thine own child's head?
For a taint there cleaves to the people redeemed
with blood, [Str. 2.
And a plague to the blood-red hand.

ERECHTHEUS

The rain shall not cleanse it, the dew nor the
sacred flood
That blesses the glad live land.
In the darkness of earth beneath, in the world
without sun, [Ant. 2.
The shadows of past things reign;
And a cry goes up from the ghost of an ill deed
done,
And a curse for a virgin slain.

ATHENA

Hear, men that mourn, and woman without mate,
Hearken; ye sick of soul with fear, and thou
Dumb-stricken for thy children; hear ye too,
Earth, and the glory of heaven, and winds of the air,
And the most holy heart of the deep sea,
Late wrath, now full of quiet; hear thou, sun,
Rolled round with the upper fire of rolling heaven
And all the stars returning; hills and streams,
Springs and fresh fountains, day that seest these
deeds,
Night that shalt hide not; and thou child of mine,
Child of a maiden, by a maid redeemed,
Blood-guiltless, though bought back with innocent
blood,
City mine own; I Pallas bring thee word,
I virgin daughter of the most high God
Give all you charge and lay command on all
The word I bring be wasted not; for this
The Gods have stablished and his soul hath sworn,
That time nor earth nor changing sons of man
Nor waves of generations, nor the winds

ERECHTHEUS

Of ages risen and fallen that steer their tides
Through light and dark of birth and lovelier death
From storm toward haven inviolable, shall see
So great a light alive beneath the sun
As the awless eye of Athens; all fame else
Shall be to her fame as a shadow in sleep
To this wide noon at waking; men most praised
In lands most happy for their children found
Shall hold as highest of honours given of God
To be but likened to the least of thine,
Thy least of all, my city; thine shall be
The crown of all songs sung, of all deeds done
Thine the full flower for all time; in thine hand
Shall time be like a sceptre, and thine head
Wear worship for a garland; nor one leaf
Shall change or winter cast out of thy crown
Till all flowers wither in the world; thine eyes
Shall first in man's flash lightning liberty,
Thy tongue shall first say freedom; thy first hand
Shall loose the thunder terror as a hound
To hunt from sunset to the springs of the sun
Kings that rose up out of the populous east
To make their quarry of thee, and shall strew
With multitudinous limbs of myriad herds
The foodless pastures of the sea, and make
With wrecks immeasurable and unsummed defeat
One ruin of all their many-folded flocks
Ill shepherded from Asia; by thy side
Shall fight thy son the north wind, and the sea
That was thine enemy shall be sworn thy friend
And hand be struck in hand of his and thine
To hold faith fast for aye; with thee, though each

ERECHTHEUS

Make war on other, wind and sea shall keep
Peace, and take truce as brethren for thy sake
Leagued with one spirit and single-hearted strength
To break thy foes in pieces, who shall meet
The wind's whole soul and might of the main sea
Full in their face of battle, and become
A laughter to thee; like a shower of leaves
Shall their long galleys rank by staggering rank
Be dashed adrift on ruin, and in thy sight
The sea deride them, and that lord of the air
Who took by violent hand thy child to wife
With his loud lips bemock them, by his breath
Swept out of sight of being; so great a grace
Shall this day give thee, that makes one in heart
With mine the deep sea's godhead, and his son
With him that was thine helmsman, king with king,
Dead man with dead; such only names as these
Shalt thou call royal, take none else or less
To hold of men in honour; but with me
Shall these be worshipped as one God, and mix
With mine the might of their mysterious names
In one same shrine served singly, thence to keep
Perpetual guard on Athens; time and change,
Masters and lords of all men, shall be made
To thee that knowest no master and no lord
Servants; the days that lighten heaven and nights
That darken shall be ministers of thine
To attend upon thy glory, the great years
As light-engraven letters of thy name
Writ by the sun's hand on the front of the earth
For world-beholden witness; such a gift
For one fair chaplet of three lives enwreathed

ERECHTHEUS

To hang for ever from thy storied shrine,
And this thy steersman fallen with tiller in hand
To stand for ever at thy ship's helm seen,
Shall he that bade their threefold flower be shorn
And laid him low that planted, give thee back
In sign of sweet land reconciled with sea
And heavenlike earth with heaven; such promise-
pledge

I daughter without mother born of God
To the most woful mother born of man
Plight for continual comfort. Hail, and live
Beyond all human hap of mortal doom
Happy; for so my sire hath sworn and I.

PRAXITHEA

O queen Athena, from a heart made whole
Take as thou givest us blessing; never tear
Shall stain for shame nor groan untune the song
That as a bird shall spread and fold its wings
Here in thy praise for ever, and fulfil
The whole world's crowning city crowned with thee
As the sun's eye fulfils and crowns with sight
The circling crown of heaven. There is no grief
Great as the joy to be made one in will
With him that is the heart and rule of life
And thee, God born of God; thy name is ours,
And thy large grace more great than our desire.

CHORUS

From the depth of the springs of my spirit a fountain
is poured of thanksgiving,
My country, my mother, for thee,

ERECHTHEUS

That thy dead for their death shall have life in thy
sight and a name everliving
At heart of thy people to be.
In the darkness of change on the waters of time they
shall turn from afar
To the beam of this dawn for a beacon, the light of
these pyres for a star.
They shall see thee who love and take comfort, who
hate thee shall see and take warning,
Our mother that makest us free;
And the sons of thine earth shall have help of the
waves that made war on their morning,
And friendship and fame of the sea.

NOTES

v. 497-503. Cf. Eurip. Fr. *Erechtheus*, 46-49.

v. 522-530. Id. 32-40.

v. 778. Æsch. *Supp.* 524-6.

v. 983. Soph. Fr. (*Oreithyia*) 655.

ὑπέρ τε πόντον πάντ' ἐπ' ἔσχατα χθονὸς
νυκτός τε πηγὰς οὐρανοῦ τ' ἀναπτυχὰς,
Φοίβου παλαιὸν κῆπον.

v. 1163. Æsch. Fr. (*Danaides*) 38.

ῥμβρος δ' ἀπ' εὐνάεντος οὐρανοῦ πεσὼν
ἔκυσε γαῖαν.

v. 1168. Id.

δενδρῶτις ὥρα δ' ἐκ νοτίζοντος γάμου
τέλειός ἐστι.

v. 1749. 'God born of God.' Soph. *Ant.* 834. θεός τοι καὶ
θεογενής.

END OF VOL. IV.

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v. 4

Swinburne.

Tristram of Lyonesse.

Tale of Balen.

Atalanta in Calydon.

Erechtheus.

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